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Visual artists in the German Democratic Republic and their cultural exchange with Italy. A brief overview

Silvana Greco

This study is based on an interactionist perspective, which conceives the art world as a social system. According to this view, the art world involves an interconnected group of actors, who share common interests and are embedded in a network of social relations. The aim of the essay is to offer an overview of the activity of visual artists in the German Democratic Republic and to outline their cultural exchange with Italy. Since the 1950s this interchange between GDR and Italy was supported by several actors and institutions at various levels (micro, meso and macro).

Key words: sociology of art, art world, interactionist perspective, visual artists, socialist realism

Introduction

Since the foundation of the German Democratic Republic (7 October 1949) and until its end (3 October 1990, accession to the FRG), there were different cultural exchanges between the visual artists – painters, graphic artists, designers, stage designers, sculptors – of the GDR and their colleagues in Italy. The cultural policy of the GDR was interested not only in the culture of the Soviet Union and of other communist countries, but also in the cultural developments of the capitalist countries, including Italy.

We will offer an overview of the cultural exchange between visual artists from the German Democratic Republic and from Italy since 1949 until the fall of the Berlin wall. Our analysis is based on an interactionist perspective, which conceives the art world as a social system, staged by an interconnected group of actors – artists, suppliers, collectors, dealers, critics, academics, and customers – who share common interests and who are embedded in a network of social relations (Fine 2004, 5)¹.

1. The interactionist approach used in this article relies on Alan Gary Fine's conceptualization (Fine 2004). In his *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*, Fine develops Howard Becker's «art world» concept (Becker 1982). Becker defined art world as «the network of people whose cooperative activities, organized via their joined knowledge of conventional means of doing things produces the kind of artworks that the art world is noted for» (Becker 1982, X). Becker analyses the artists and the related activities and the division of labour needed to produce the artwork (Becker 1982). While Becker focuses on the artists and the production of the art work, Fine expands the idea of an «art world» that incorporates not only a network of producers, but also all those who *invested* in the production that come to characterize the domain» (Fine 2004, 5). For Fine the art world is a *social system* «because it depends on routinized exchange relations, it is also a market» (2004, 5). According to his approach the different actors of this social system are the following ones: the *artists*, who produces valued objects; the *collectors*, who consume these valued objects; the *dealers*, who link producers and consumers, sellers and buyers make a profit; and finally, *academics*,

As we shall learn later, when we briefly analyze the various phases of this process, the exchange was not always peaceful and smooth, but was characterized by debates and conflicts as well.

For more than forty years, these contacts have been multifaceted, complex, creative but also ambivalent and conflicting.

These tensions can only be understood in the context of the Cold War and of the political differences between the two countries (Martini 2007).

On the one hand, the aim of the cultural institutions of the GDR and of the leading functionaries of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) was to facilitate the contacts of Italian visual artists with the GDR. On the other hand, they also supported trips to Italy of GDR visual artists. Some of them had the opportunity to exhibit their works of art in Italian art galleries. As a rule, these contacts weren't made possible by individual artists or smaller associations. To promote partnerships was the task of the institutional actors of the GDR, such as the State Cultural Commission, the Association of Visual Artists, the Ministry of Culture, the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee or the Humboldt University.

In most cases, Italian visual artists were officially invited by the authorities of the GDR, that aimed at bringing them in contact with socialist realism as well as with everyday life in East Germany, a «real life» that was obviously staged for these foreign visitors. They were shown factories, schools, sports facilities, *kindergarten*. Because of this «cultural tourism», visitors from Italy were expected to support the ideological propaganda of socialist society. Some of them, who were close to the art style of socialist realism, such as the Italian painter and graphic artist Gabriele Mucchi, eventually settled down in the GDR and were appointed professors to the Art Academies of the GDR.

However, not all Italian intellectuals were interested in confronting themselves creatively with the visual artists of the GDR. Those Italian visual artists who differed from socialist realism and who preferred abstract and non-figurative painting, did not comply with the guidelines of the SED. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany demanded from its artists «a true and historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development» (Martini 2007, 37 cit. by Jäger 1994, 41). The intellectual and creative autonomy of the artists was strongly limited by politics – as in most authoritarian regimes – and the communist regime conceived the arts as a means of education (Rehberg 2003, 46), aimed to promoting the construction of a socialist society. Notwithstanding such restrictions, the fine arts in

critics, curators, who validate objects and producers, providing ostensibly unbiased and informed judgements, even if these judgements may be political and self-interested. Hence, according to Fine in order to understand an artwork one has to focus on the different social interaction among artists, collectors, community, markets and institutions.

the GDR were characterized by diversity and heterogeneity. There was not only an officially promoted visual art, which was called socialist realism, but also various «schools» – the Leipzig School – of the first, second and third generation – which partly differentiated themselves from socialist realism, the Dresden School, the Berlin School etc. Because of this, the widespread interpretative scheme that equates East German visual art with socialist realism and the West German art with abstract art (Rehberg 2011) falls short of explaining the complexity and diversity as well as the regional differences of the visual arts in the GDR.

In fact, not all painters adopted socialist realism in their works. As an example, the non-figurative paintings by Herbert Behrens-Hangelier can be cited as well as the magical realism with surreal traits of some exponents of the Leipzig school, as for instance the famous painter Werner Tübke. Further styles diverging from socialist realism are the allegorical style of Heidrun Hegewald or the mythological images of some artists, who participated at the Venice Biennale in 1984. A good example of such a style (Rehberg *et al.* 2012) is the «Sisyphus myth» of Wolfgang Mattheuer (Biennale di Venezia 1984, 42).

In addition, the paintings in the style of «socialist realism» served not only as educational means for the people, but also for instructing the ruling élite (Rehberg 2003, 53). This was particularly true in connection with the uprising of June 17, 1953. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg has aptly noted: «the educational conditions were reversed: the cultural functionaries finally had to be instructed by their most admired artists» (2003, 53). For this reason, we find jesters, jugglers, and harlequins in different paintings of Mattheuer, Heisig and Tübke. It was usually the jester, who kept the mirror of the truth in front of the eyes of prince.

The critical attitude of certain Italian artists and intellectuals towards the GDR was not exclusively due to differences in artistic style, but also had an ideological background. The GDR was regarded by many of them as an unattractive model of socialism, where the Marxist-Leninist ideology was intertwined with authoritarianism (Martini 2007, 12). These artists reflected the opinion of Italy's leading class during the 1950s and 1960s. To such a negative attitude it must be added also the fact that the Italian Republic recognized the GDR as a State of its own in 1973 only (18 January 1973) (Martini 2007, 221).

Oppositely, all the Italian visual artists (as well as writers, musicians, theater directors, actors, etc.), who were attracted by the GDR, considered it to be the «new Germany». A new country, which not only had the courage to remove itself from the cruel German's Nazi past, but had also begun its road toward a new revolutionary socialist society. Most of these artists had fought Fascism in the Second World War. Among them there were some sympathizers and members of the Italian Communist Party (*PCI - Partito comunista italiano*).

In contrast to the role played by the official institutions in the GDR, the Italian institutions at the macro level, such as the Ministry of Culture, were not responsible for exchanges with GDR artists. The actors that promoted exchanges from the Italian side came from the micro and meso-levels.

Italian actors at the micro level were individual artists, for example the painter Gabriele Mucchi, who emigrated to the GDR for a period and lived there for a few years (Guidali 2012; Mucchi 1997). Or artists, like Giuseppe Pastore, who were based in Italy and took an active part in giving GDR visual artists the opportunity to present their works of art in Italy.

Actors at the meso-level were small to medium-size Italian art galleries, such as the Milan gallery of art «Galleria del Levante», that exhibited the works of Werner Tübke in 1971. Quite active in the support of cultural exchanges between Italy and the GDR were also foundations and associations, such as the Italy–GDR Association (Associazione Italia–Repubblica Democratica Tedesca), that in 1985 organized an impressive exhibition of the art in the GDR at the Lingotto, a district of Turin (Giordano 1985).

As far as the macro level is concerned, it took almost a decade after the official recognition of the GDR (18.01.1973), until the world-famous Venice Biennale invited GDR visual artists. The first Biennale, attended by artists from East Germany, took place in 1982.

Three different phases of this cultural exchange between the GDR and Italy can be identified.

1. First phase: cultural exchange and cultural policy of the 1950s

During this first phase, both countries focused on their respective economic and political development. Under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht (1893-1873), the GDR was concerned with the socialist transformation of the economy, including the collectivization of agriculture. Time and resources for cultural relations with capitalist countries were scarce.

Italy was also confronted with the difficult post-war period. Many cities were largely destroyed; unemployment and poverty prevailed throughout the country. It was difficult to revive the economy, and at the same time to harmonize an agrarian society (especially in the South of Italy) with a growing industrial society (especially in Northern Italy). It was not until the end of the 1950s that the economy came into its own. As it happened in other European countries, Italy experienced in this period the so-called economic miracle (*miracolo economico*).

The political development in Italy was characterized by great difficulties as well. The democratization of the country was hindered by many social and cultur-

al obstacles that have not been fully solved to the present day. Among such long-term troubles, there are the collusion between economic powers and political forces, the organized crime of the mafia («the invisible state in the state»), a problematic National and civil consciousness (Salvadori 2007) and the «amoral familism», to say it in the words of the anthropologist Edward C. Banfield (1967).

These economic and political changes brought with them profound social and cultural processes: an improvement in the material quality of life of the middle class (many consumer goods were accessible to wider social strata), more freedom and territorial mobility for women, new lifestyles and practices based on work, consumption and leisure activities. At the same time, these new lifestyles produced great criticism on the part of the Catholic Church, which saw the loss of basic Catholic values in the aggressive capitalist development of Italy. The Catholic Church feared the collapse of the patriarchal family, the loss of traditional women's roles as a wife and a mother, the abandonment of the old lifestyle, based on modesty, spirituality and double moral standard. In addition, internal migration (from Southern Italy to Northern Italy) heated the social tensions between Northern and Southern Italy and had an impact on the working and living conditions of the working class. The Italian communist party widened its influence. It became one of the strongest communist parties in West Europe, faithful to the leading role of the Soviet Union at least until the middle of the 1950s.

1.1 Cultural exchange and socialist realism

In this decade, the cultural relations between the GDR and Italy were fairly peaceful, albeit limited and one-sided.

It was mostly the Italian Marxist intellectuals and artists, who traveled from Italy to the GDR and not vice versa (Ulisse 1953; Cases 1958; Martini 2007).

In Italy, this cultural exchange was strongly encouraged, directed and partly funded by the Cultural Commission, founded in 1948 by the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

The aim of the Cultural Commission, which lasted until 1956, was to enhance and strengthen the relationships with the left-wing intellectuals and artists in Italy and abroad. Although a strong majority of the Party members, especially the workerists and the anti-intellectuals, were distrustful of or even opposed to the Commission, its mission was to give a political and organizational support for all those cultural and scientific activities which permitted a renewal of Italian culture (Vittoria 1990, 136).

The importance of supporting a politically engaged culture became a high priority for the PCI after the election of 1948, in which the PCI had been excluded from

the Government forces. The Commission referred to Antonio Gramsci's idea of culture and to his intersection between politics and culture (Landy 1986, 53). In order to achieve the support of popular masses, the preliminary task was to change the culture of the working class, in order to create a cultural hegemony. Gramsci (1923-1937) «rejected the possibility of taking power only by means of the violent insurrection of an organized political avant-guard» (Gómez Gutiérrez 2015, 1). Gramsci was convinced that only through education and organization it would be possible to liberate the oppressed social groups and to build a new society (Landy 1986, 67). Education is not a «merely descriptive or taxonomic» (Landy 1986, 62) but provides a basis for practices and revolutionary action. Hence, the role of intellectuals and artists is crucial for the renewal of society. As Marcia Landy underlines, Gramsci «wished to demonstrate that social change depends on deconstructing and demystifying interpersonal relations, social roles, all institutional practices, which have been naturalized and considered inevitable» (*ivi*, 55). It is easily understandable that the final aim of artworks should be directed to these very goals as well. The left-wing Italian visual artists near to realism embraced Gramsci's thoughts and shared the idea of an intersection and interrelation between art and politics. One of them was the painter and architect Gabriele Mucchi (1899-2002)², who contributed significantly to the cultural exchange between the visual artist of the GDR and Italy.

The first meeting ground between Italian visual artists and their colleagues from the GDR during this decade was socialist realism, which «become a powerful stimulus for intellectuals because it proposed a new art of the masses; it declared the end of Modernist individualism; formulated a new notion of personal responsibility» (Gómez Gutiérrez 2015, 142)³.

In this phase, the role played by Gabriele Mucchi, who started and enhanced the cultural exchange among visual artists of the GDR and Italy, was a crucial one. He met and collaborated with many visual artists and intellectuals of the GDR, such as Bertolt Brecht, for whom he designed the theater drawings for «The Good Person of Szechwan» (Mucchi 2007), Fritz Cremer, Christa von Carnap,

2. Gabriele Mucchi (1899-2002) was born in Turin in 1899. After graduating from high school, he studied architecture and construction at the University of Bologna. After completing his studies, he first worked in a construction company in Rome, and then he moved in 1927 to an architectural office in Milan. After a stay in Berlin in the years 1928 to 1930, after the Second World War, Gabriele Mucchi lived in the GDR for a long time. From 1956 to 1961 he worked as a professor at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, from 1961 to 1963 at the Caspar David Friedrich Institute of the University of Greifswald. Later on, he kept commuting between Milan and Berlin. Several works of Gabriele Mucchi were shown in the museums and archives of the GDR («Portrait of rice worker Ada», 1954, «The Tempest», 1957 in Dresden State Art Collection and «Per la vita», 1982, in the Art Archive Beeskow) (Mucchi 1989). Mucchi lived in Paris from 1931 to 1934. In the following years, he achieved some international renown thanks to his impressive murals.

3. Although there was a partial alignment with the official GDR culture, the Italian Communist politicians and its Cultural Commission unlike those of SED strongly invited Italian visual artists to embrace socialist realism but could not impose it to them (Gómez Gutiérrez 2015, 145).

Arno Mohr, René Graetz⁴, just to mention some of them (Martini 2007, 84-85). Mucchi, who adhered to socialist realism, influenced in turn some painters of the GDR, who took him as a model (Mucchi 1989).

1.2 Cultural exchange and the fight against Fascism and Nazism

The second meeting ground of Italian and GDR visual artists was the fight against the past, the battle against Fascism and Nazism. To embrace socialist realism meant both for Italian and GDR artists to break totally with a recent past full of suffering.

Many Italian Marxist visual artists still remembered the difficult period under the fascist regime, which targeted and persecuted them. Mucchi himself had been discriminated under Fascism. In 1941, as Juan José Gómez Guitiérrez reports, he had been excluded from a teaching position at Brera Academy in Milan for refusing to swear fidelity to Fascism (Gómez Guitiérrez 2015, 190).

The birth of the GDR represented not only a new political and economic regime that contrasted West Germany but also a radical turn from the greatest human tragedy of the 20th century.

Some GDR painters and sculptors, such as Fritz Cremer (1906-1993) and Herbert Sandberg (1908-1991), focused in their artworks on the Holocaust and on its victims. Mucchi was befriended with both of them.

Fritz Cremer has left sensual-intimate pairs of lovers and female nudes. In some of his works he has expressed states of emotions such as suffering, anxiety, despair, but also rebellion, resistance and strength. He became well-known for the memorials of the concentration camps (for example, of Buchenwald concentration camp). These artworks testify his personal and collective reworking of the Holocaust.

The graphic artist and cartoonist Herbert Sandberg was heavily persecuted under the Nazi regime because of his Jewish origins and of his political ideology. During his long imprisonment in the concentration camp of Buchenwald, he started a wood sculpture of a young imprisoned boy. He then carried on an imaginary dialogue with the sculpture, explaining to «him» all he had to know about the concentration camp. Having survived the Shoah, he drew in the Mid Sixties a portrait of himself in the concentration camp confronted by the rest of the German population, who «didn't know», also portrayed in the painting. It was his *j'accuse* against the German civil society under the Third Reich.

4. René Graetz (1908-1974), born and raised in Geneva, was a sculptor, graphic artist and painter. After leaving Switzerland, he lived in East Berlin, worked as a designer in the publishing house «Volk und Wissen», and finally became a freelance artist. He had been married to the Irish graphic artist and book author Elizabeth Shaw since 1944. He became friend of Gabriele Mucchi while the latter was living in East Berlin.

2. Second phase: the cultural exchange in the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s the cultural exchange between the GDR and Italy became more intense. As soon as several social actors became involved in the micro and meso level, the interaction between the two countries became more complex. The contacts were also more critical than during the 1950s. The fluctuations largely depended on the political situation during the Cold War.

Although not all intellectuals were against the construction of the Berlin wall – the «Catholic-Communist» journalist Massimo Calderazzi, for instance, explained the flight of many East Germans to West Germany solely with economic factors –, the majority of the Western population who opposed Marxism interpreted the construction of the wall as a manifold restriction of democratic rights. The Italian Communists began their «own path to socialism» (*la via italiana al socialismo*), which was to be achieved within a democratic frame. This detachment from the Soviet regime intensified in 1972 when Enrico Berlinguer took over the leadership of the Italian Communist Party and developed his «Euro Communism» in collaboration with the French and Spanish communist parties (Galli 1999).

The change in the policy of the SED after the building of the Berlin wall left its traces in the artistic field as well. In 1961 Gabriele Mucchi's gallery «Galerie Konkret» was criticized by the functionaries of the SED in East Berlin and eventually closed (Martini 2007, 151), on the grounds that his art diverged from the principles of the Communist Party. Until then the works of Mucchi had been much appreciated, both by the SED and by various artists, not only visual ones, such as Bertolt Brecht. Brecht had presented some of his poems to Mucchi, as a token of gratitude for having helped him and other artists to oppose socialist realism (Martini 2007).

The new attitude of the GDR toward its artists had an impact on Italy as well. In 1961 the Ministry of Culture, forbade the «Berliner Ensemble» to stage a piece by Brecht in Italy (Martini 2007).

Although the atmosphere between the GDR and Italy had deteriorated since the early 1960s, some GDR artists were still able to travel to Italy in order to exhibit their works there, usually with the support of other artists or organizations.

One example is the painter Heinrich Kilger⁵, who came to Venice thanks to the help of the neo-realistic painter Giuseppe Pastore⁶. In collaboration with the

5. Heinrich Kilger (1907-1970), born in Heidelberg, was an important stage designer of the Deutsches Theater Berlin. Among other things, he designed Bertolt Brecht's «Mother Courage and Her Children» in 1949 (Funke 1975).

6. Giuseppe Pastore (1935-1999), born in Venice in 1935, lived for some time in the GDR after his training in the mid-1960s. From 1964 to 1968 he worked as a set designer at the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin (Kilger 1953). He also worked with other theatres in the GDR (Maxim-Gorki-Theater and the Berliner Ensemble) and with the German television. During this time, he came into contact with many GDR artists, with whom he built a fruitful artistic exchange. He succeeded in making some painters of the GDR known in Italy, among them Heinrich Kilger.

Deutsches Theater and the Academy of Arts in Berlin and with the support of the city of Venice, Giuseppe Pastore succeeded in organizing the first exhibition of the painter Heinrich Kilger in Venice in 1967.

2.1 *Art markets in Italy: galleries and collectors*

Besides public institutions, the cultural exchange among Italian and GDR visual artists was driven also at a meso level by social actors of the Italian art market – galleries, collectors and buyers – but not of the GDR. Indeed, in the East Germany an «art market» in the sense of the capitalistic societies did not exist.

Visual artists from the GDR were offered the opportunity to expose their artworks in ten galleries of North and Centre Italy, in six different cities (Milan, Genoa, Turin, Modena, Florence and, Venice) (see Tab. 1). We will briefly outline the exchange in three Italian cities: Genoa, Milan, Venice.

In Milan, an important role was played by the gallery owner and art dealer Emilio Bentornati, thanks to whom the Leipzig painters became known in Italy. Noteworthy was also the role played by the Dedalo gallery.

In the 1960s Bentornati had traveled often to the GDR, in order to find «traces of a picturesque, socially critical objectivity» (Rehberg 2013, 197).

After having written his works on the New Objectivity (Bentornati 1968, 1969), he invited in 1970 Volker Stelzmann (Negri 2002) and Ulrich Hachulla to the exhibition «Giovane pittura tedesca» (Rehberg 2009, 153)⁷. The Italian art critic Roberto Tassi saw «these Leipzig artists as the creators of a social painting in the tradition of Otto Dix, who had also developed a new irony as a way to access reality, and had discovered in reality mysterious features that would make its ambiguity visible for the first time ever» (Rehberg 2009, 153; Tassi 1970).

One year later, Bentornati invited Werner Tübke to Italy. The paintings of Werner Tübke were exhibited for the first time in Milan in Bentornati's art gallery «Del Levante» and afterwards were brought to Rome, Brescia, Modena and Florence. Bentornati interpreted Tübke painting and those of the Leipzig School as social criticism, not only against the Nazi past – e. g. Tübke's *Requiem* (1965) – but also against the totalitarian society of the GDR. Tübke's works cannot be labelled simply as opposed to abstract art, and as a kind of «ideological realism» which used «educational means» as socialist art often did in the GDR (Rehberg 2011, 161). Although some images by Tübke – like his famous *Early Bourgeois Revolution in Germany* (1976-1987) for the Memorial Bad Frankenhausen – served educational goals as well (Rehberg 2011, p 163), his art transcends this narrow ideological perspective.

7. For an in-depth analysis about the history of the New Objectivity movement see Michalski (1998).

Elements of magical surrealism and mannerism are evident in Tübke's *œuvre*. His relationship with Bentornati made his access to Italy easier. After his first exhibition, he often returned to Italy, which, despite its political past, remained a «country of longing» for many artists, as Rehberg has put it (Rehberg 2013, 198). In fact, Tübke's work is strongly influenced by Italian art. Tübke was inspired, among others, by the Italian painters Tintoretto, Pontorno, Bronzino and Luca della Robbia (Rehberg 2011; Rehberg, Holler and Kaiser 2012).

Tübke's artworks were also shown, during the 1970s, in Milan at the «Compagnia del Disegno» as well as at the art gallery «La Mutina» in Modena.

Bentornati's relationship with the GDR deteriorated in the 1970s as the GDR authorities accused him of economic profit-driven interests (Rehberg 2013). This shows the great ambivalence of the Communist regime, considering that, according to a conversation between the sociologist Karl-Sigrid Rehberg and the main tenant of the Leipzig School, Werne, on May 19, 2000, «Tübke was officially pushed into Italy to make watercolor because it sells so well» (Rehberg 2003, 15). Further painters and graphic artists of the GDR were supported by other Italian art galleries. One of them was Heinz Zander, who exhibited his works at the «Galleria del Levante».

Another important actor of the art market in Milan, which supported the cultural exchange among visual artist of Italy and GDR, was the «Dedalo Gallery», which organized a solo exhibition of Willi Sitte⁸ already in 1946. Willi Sitte continued to have an intense exchange with Italian artists thanks to the friendship with Andrea Volo⁹, an Italian painter from Palermo. Andrea Volo knew Sitte's artworks from the time he lived in Munich but he met by person Willi Sitte in Rome in 1974. They became closed friends (Rehberg 2009, 154).

In Genoa, the cultural exchange was promoted by the commitment of Giorgio Devoto, born there in 1941. He founded his own publishing house and art gallery «San Marco dei Giustiniani», which was active until 1999. Besides meeting with several painters of New Objectivity, including Otto Dix, he was also acquainted

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8. Willi Sitte (1921-2013), born 1921 in Kratzau, today Czech Republic, grew up in a communist family (his father came from Germany while his mother was Czech). His parents recognized very early his uncommon artistic talent and supported his training as a painter. His relationship with Italy goes back to the 1940s. In 1944, as he was a soldier of the Wehrmacht in Italy, he took on contacts with the Italian Resistance Movement (Resistenza).
 9. Andrea Volo (1941), born in Palermo in 1941, made his first solo exhibition in his city when he was 19 years-old. He then founded the «Galleria del Borgo» (art gallery Borgo) with Maurilio Catalano (Catalano 2013) and Raffaello Piraino in the capital town of Sicily. In the mid-1960s he went to Germany, first to Munich, where he studied at the Munich College of Fine Arts thanks to a scholarship from the DAAD, then he went to Salzburg. In Munich he first saw pictures of Willi Sitte. In 1968 he returned to Italy and settled in Rome. In addition to his artistic activity, he worked in the Communist Workers' Association CGIL, where he became the chairman of the «Sindacato degli artisti». This artist section of CGIL supported the exchange between visual artists of the GDR and Italy. In 1974, Volo met for the first time in Rome Sitte (Rehberg 2009, p. 154), who had been elected President of the Association of Visual Artists of the GDR just that year and served in this position until 1988.

with Werner Tübke, one of the most important painters of the GDR as we have seen and co-founder of the Leipzig school. Devoto organized an exhibition of Tübke works in his art gallery in 1975.

Finally, yet importantly, it is worth mentioning the fruitful artistic relationship between the painter and graphic artist Ronald Paris (1933 born in Sonderhausen, now living in Rangsdorf) and the Italian Silvestro Lodi (born in Marostica in the province of Vicenza in 1943, now living in Venice). The two painters organized an exhibition in Venice with various visual artists from the GDR.

One of the results of this complex and articulated exchange among visual artists of GDR and Italy, is a remarkable Italian presence at the Triennale Intergraphic, founded by the German Visual Artists' Association (VBKD) in 1965 (Rehberg 2009, p. 154).

Table 1 Italian galleries and GDR visual artists

Cities in Italy and Region	Italian art galleries	GDR visual artists and year of exposition
Milan (Lombardy)	Galleria del Levante	Volker Stelzmann (1970), Ulrich Hachulla (1970), Werner Tübke (1971, 1973), Heinz Zander (1976)
	Compagnia del Disegno	Werner Tübke (1975)
	Dedalo	Willi Sitte (1946, 1955)
Genoa (Liguria)	Galleria dell'Arte San Marco dei Giustiniani	Werner Tübke (1975)
	Galleria Teatro del Falcone	Volker Stelzmann (1980)
Turin (Piedmont)	Lingotto	Fritz Cremer (1985), Alfred Frank (1985), Lea Langer Grundig (1985), Hans Grundig (1985), Josef Hegenbarth (1985), Bernhard Heisig (1985), Otto Niemeyer Holstein (1985), Werner Klemke (1985), Bernhard Kretzschmar (1985), Wolfgang Mattheuer (1985), Harald Metzkes (1985), Karl Erich Müller (1985), Hans Theo Richter (1985), Willi Sitte (1985), Karl Völker (1985)
Modena (Emilia-Romagna)	Galleria Mutina	Werner Tübke (1971), Heinz Zander (nach 1973)
Florence (Tuscany)	Galleria dell'arte	Werner Tübke (1971/1972)
Rome (Lazio)	Galleria II Fante di Spade	Werner Tübke (1971)
	Galleria Toninelli	Tübke (1979)

Source: elaboration of the author

3. Third phase: the cultural exchange in the 1980s

The 1980s saw the third phase of the intercultural exchange between the GDR and Italy in the context of the visual arts.

In this phase, actors of the art world at the macro level such as the public and institutional art exhibitions of Italy Venice Biennale, one of the oldest international art exhibitions in Europe founded in 1895, played a central role.

Germany has had its own pavilion at the Venice Biennale since 1909, while the German Democratic Republic only got its own exhibition space in the pavilion of the decorative arts from 1982 onwards.

In 1982, four painters from the GDR participated to the Venice Biennale for the first time (Raum 1982, 170). The first was Uwe Pfeifer¹⁰, the second Volker Stelzman¹¹, the third Heidrun Hegewald¹² and the fourth Sigrie Gille¹³.

Then in 1984, Werner Tübke exhibited his artworks at the Biennale (Biennale di Venezia 1984, Raum 1984). He was particularly well known for his monumental panorama in Bad Frankenhausen about the peasant wars in the 16th century. As we have already mentioned in discussing the activity of the «Galleria del Levante» in Milan, he had detached himself from socialist realism and had approached magical realism with some surreal traits.

Finally, in 1988, one year before the peaceful revolution, three further, important visual artists exposed their artworks at the Biennale di Venezia: Angela Hampel¹⁴,

10. Uwe Pfeifer (1947) was born in 1947 in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt). He studied in the late 1960s- early 1970s at the College of Visual Arts of Leipzig with Werner Tübke, Hans Mayer-Foreyt and Wolfgang Mattheuer. After graduation, he returned to his hometown. He received in 1975 a lectureship in lithography at the Art Academy Burg Giebichenstein in Halle (Saale). One of his first works was a series of images taken from everyday life in New City. In 1976 and 1978 he travelled to Mongolia, which proved to be a further source of inspiration for his paintings and graphics.

11. Volker Stelzman (1940) was born 1940 in Dresden (Saxony). In 1948 his family moved to Leipzig. He studied from 1957-1960 electromechanics and worked as an electromechanical technician from 1960-1963. He then started to study at the Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst Leipzig. Stelzman worked as a freelance artist from 1968 to 1973. He was inspired by Pontorno, Rosso Fiorentino, Otto Dix (Beck 2003) and by the artists of the New Objectivity. After several trips to the Soviet Union, he visited Bulgaria, Cuba and India. From 1970 to 1986 he was a member of the Association for Visual Arts of the GDR, and from 1978 to 1986 he was chairman of its Central Section. From 1988 until 2006 he was Professor at the Universität der Künste Berlin.

12. Heidrun Hegewald (1936) was born in 1936 in Meißen (Saxony), where she spent her childhood and adolescence. She finished the high school in 1954 in Dresden. Since 1955 Hegewald studied fashion design at the Berlin School of Engineering for the Garment Industry, and then, from 1958 to 1960, graphic design at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee. She worked as a graphic-designer from 1960 to 1971. Her son Gregor was born in 1961. From 1971 to 1974 she studied at the Art Academy (Akademie der Künste) in East Berlin. She became Member of the Association of Visual Artist (Verband Bildender Künstler) of GDR in 1967 (until 1993). From 1978 until 1988 she was a member of the board of the Association. Since 1975 she worked as a painter, graphic and designer. At the end of the 1970s, she became a writer and started to publish essays about art and the role of women; in 2011 she wrote her own autobiography (Hegewald 2011). After the fall of the Berlin wall she worked as a medical assistant from 1993 until 2014. In 1997 she married Dr. Karl-Gustav Meyer, who had been her partner for many years. She currently lives and works in Berlin-Karow.

13. Sighard Gille (1941) was born in 1941 in Eilenburg (Saxony). From 1965 to 1970 he studied with Bernhard Heisig and Wolfgang Mattheuer at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig and received there his painting diploma. From 1973 to 1976 he continued his studies with Bernhard Heisig at the German Academy of Arts in East Berlin. From 1976 to 1980 he was an assistant at the Academy of Graphics and Book Design in Leipzig and in 1986 he became a professor. Besides being a painter, he is also a photographer. He belonged to the New Leipzig School (Mensch 1989). He lives currently in Leipzig.

14. Angela Hampel (1956) was born in 1956 in Räckelwitz (Saxony). She lives and works in Dresden. She first studied to become forestry technicians from 1972 until 1974. She worked as a forestry technician for two years after she fin-

Sigried Klotz¹⁵ and again Heidrun Hegewald, with her work «The Mother with the Child» 1984-85 (Biennale di Venezia 1988, 383).

The first ever participation of the GDR was an important and a significant event both from a political and a cultural point of view. Being admitted to one of the most important international art exhibitions in Europe meant for the GDR to receive full social and political recognition as a separate State from West Germany. Secondly, it gave to the GDR the opportunity to show, to a worldwide audience, the artworks of visual artists who had an approach to art that differed significantly from the art ideals of the visual artists of other capitalistic countries, among them of West Germany.

The selection of the visual artists from the GDR, who were entitled to show their artworks at the Biennale, was not a fortuity. The decision was taken by the Association of Visual Arts (VBK-Verband Bildender Künstler). The VBK was founded in 1950, June 17-18, as a part of the Cultural Federation for the democratic renewal of Germany (Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands) and was based in East Berlin¹⁶. The aim of the VBK, which obtained money from different State organizations and from the State industry, was to support its members both through funding and by networking (Mey 1994, 86). The function of the Association was to represent a mediator for the visual artists (both men and women), and to offer them different kinds of financial supporting such as scholarships, awards for travelling abroad, subsidies for the purchase of working materials, rental of ateliers and pensions (Mey 1994, 87).

To become a member of the Association was rather easy. It was necessary to finish a visual art education, to be ideological aligned with the Communist party and to send an application in order to be admitted. If the application was accepted, the person received the status of «candidate of the VBK», which after a successful probationary period was changed into a full membership of the Association (Mey 1994, 87).

ished school while during the evening she studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden (Dresden Academy of Fine Arts) with Professors Jutta Damme and Dietmar Büttner. Since 1982, she has been working freelance in Dresden and in Berlin. In 1989, she was co-founder of the Dresden Secession. In 1990 she received the Marianne Werefkin Prize. Hampel has travelled extensively, among others to Soviet Union, Hungary, Italy, Crete, Jordan, Russia, Kenia, Vietnam, United States and Tibet.

15. Siegfried Klotz (1939-2004) was born in Oberschlema in the land of Saxony. He was a painter and professor at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts (HfBK). In 1978, he became an assistant professor in this department and received the Max Lingling Prize of the Academy of the Arts of the GDR. In 1988, he received the art prize of the FDGB and became head of the department of painting/graphics at the HfBK in Dresden. From 1992 until 2004 he was Professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden. In 2001 he received the art prize of the city of Dresden. He died in 2004 in Dresden.

16. The first president of the Association of Visual Arts (VBK) elected in 1950 was the painter Otto Nagel (1894-1967), of Jewish origin. Nagel, born in Berlin in 1894 in a working class family, had suffered severe persecution during the Nazi regime. His atelier was closed down, he was arrested and imprisoned in different concentration camps. Twenty-seven of his artworks were declared, «degenerated art» («entartete Kunst») by the Nazi Regime from 1937 to 1938 (Frommhold 1997, 711-712). Choosing Nagel as the first president of the Association meant to reaffirm the break with the past and the willingness to build a new «Nazi free» Germany.

Only the members who were considered ideologically reliable and who were actively involved in the Association, were selected to travel abroad.

Indeed, Heidrun Hegewald, who was a member of the board of the Association, was convinced that art could «stimulate creative thinking» and that art could «improve the world» (Hegewald 2011).

The topics of the artworks, which the GDR visual artists presented at the Biennale during the 1980s, belonged to the traditional repertoire of socialist realism: everyday life of workers and families during their leisure times.

Some visual artists expressed suffering, confusion and moral conflicts. Among them, Stelzman and Hegewald (Biennale 1982; Michel 2004) deserve to be mentioned. With her famous painting «Cassandra sees a snake egg» from 1981, that was exposed at the Biennale in 1982, Hegewald wanted to communicate her anxiety about contemporary history. She feared a possible atomic war, and expressed by her disgust for war and violence. At the same time, she envisaged a utopian dream for a better humanity. A relevant and recurrent topic on which Hegewald worked all her life long as a painter, was maternity. Being herself a mother, she felt the need to express her inner world and emotions and to depict the relationship between mother and child. While her other artworks are much more political or are focused on the public sphere, Hegewald scrutinizes her intimacy within the private sphere of her house: tenderness, love but also solitude and incommunicability between child and parents.

Unlike Italy and West Germany, the GDR had a high percentage of women visual artists. More than 40% of all members of the Association of Visual Artists were women (Mey 1994, 87; Eisman 2014). According to the Marxist ideology, the emancipation of women could only occur through paid employment in the public sphere. Hence, once a woman visual artist passed the examination of the Association of Visual Arts and received the official recognition as an «artist», she could rely on a stable and continuous funding of her artistic activities from the Association or other State organizations (Mey 1994, 86).

In order to realize the full emancipation of women under the socialist regime, the State supported them through services and subsidies, as they were expected to be both workers and mothers. Indeed, the socialist State wanted to represent a positive alternative to the patriarchal capitalist society. Consequently, all women, including visual artists, could rely on free nursery and *Kindergarten* for their children during their working hours, in addition to 20-22 weeks of maternal leave – with a benefit equal to the average wage in national economy (Matysiak, Steinmetz 2006, 11-12). It was a relatively short leave but it permitted a quick re-entry in the workplace without losing working skills. Since the artistic activities require a lot of concentration and many working hours, all these State facilities

enabled women to continue their activities as visual artists and to reconcile their work with their caring duties¹⁷. Visual artist women did not experience a specific discrimination in everyday life under the Communist Regime (with some exceptions, such as Angela Hampel who underlined the women's marginalization in the art world) and did not claim any extra support from the Association for Visual Artist (Mey 1994, 87). This blend of almost full female participation in the labor market and high childcare services has been the inspirational model for left-wing and Marxist Italian women's movements and political activists.

The participation at Venice Biennale by GDR visual artists strengthened the bonds among colleagues, especially between Werner Tübke and Volker Stelzman and Italian visual artists. Volker Stelzman was a great estimator of the Italian art. For his artworks he took inspiration from the Italian painters of the Renaissance such as Pontorno (1494-1557) and Rosso Fiorentino (1495-1540) (Beck 2003).

State organizations and the Association of Visual Artists kept controlling the exchange between the visual artists of the GDR and Italy during the 1980s as well, while the role of the art market was unidirectional.

Since the GDR was a Communist regime and a State planned economy, an art market similar to the one of Western capitalistic societies didn't exist. According to Kerstin Mey, «all kind of art trade, art exhibitions, art collections and media were controlled by the State, with the exception of very few art galleries such as the gallery *Kühn* in Dresden or the gallery *Eigen und art* in Leipzig» (Mey 1994, 86). Hence, only art dealers from Italy were able to buy GDR artworks, especially by Tübke, that brought to the Socialist State quite a good income.

4. Some final considerations

I would like to propose here four final considerations about the cultural exchange between GDR visual artists and their Italian colleagues. As we have seen, most of them belonged to the «realism art movement», whose ideology was closely connected to the communist party. We will reflect on the major actors who were involved in the process.

A first point to be noted, is that the intense exchange between visual artists from East Germany and Italy took place both on ideological and aesthetic grounds.

17. Because of these family policies, the GDR boasted one of the highest female participation rate in the world. In 1986 89% of women had a paid employment compared to 51.9% of West German, even if few of them were employed in higher positions (Matysiak, Steinmetz 2006, 8). Although the employment participation was so high, the division of labour inside the families in the GDR followed the «traditional pattern», based on the role of women both as workers and mothers. Women carried out the majority of caring activities and household work (Geist 2009; Adler 2002). Hence, women enjoyed a «double presence» at the workplace and in the family but suffered also from a «double burden». The ideal women role in the GDR has been termed a «compatible three role model» by the German sociologist Rainer Geissler («kompatibles Drei-Rollen Modell»: Geissler 2002, 391; Geist 2009, 420).

Since the post-war period and until the end of the cold war, many visual artists from both countries exchanged their artistic views and experiences within the frame of their anti-fascist and anti-capitalist beliefs. They wanted to overcome bourgeois abstract avant-garde, and were in search for a new aesthetics, which could replace «modernistic individualism». Artists who adhered to socialist realism considered their optimistic and politically engaged work as diametrically opposed to the decadent bourgeois modern art (Gómez Gutiérrez 2015, 4). On the one hand, this exchange was enhanced at a macro level by the cultural policies of the communist regime in the GDR, mainly through the Association for Visual Arts (Verband Bildender Künstler-VBK) of the Cultural Federation (Kulturbund). On the other hand, the exchange was sustained by the Italian Communist Party (Partito comunista italiano), one of the strongest communist parties in Europe at that time, mainly through its Cultural Commission. Indeed, the Italian Cultural Commission of the PCI supported all socialist realism visual artists, who not only described and represented the reality and the everyday life of the humble ones, of the excluded ones, but were thought to be able to awake the collective consciousness of the working class too, a fact that was considered to be a pre-condition for a political overturn.

Italian visual artists wanted to visit the GDR and to live there for a period of time in order to get new inspirations for their paintings, that were in line with socialist realism. They were catalyzed by the chance to show their artworks there as well. Italian artists had a further ideological motivation for visiting the GDR. They appreciated the opportunity to experience the everyday life of an anti-fascist and anti-capitalistic society, able to guarantee almost full employment for both men and women, and to provide them with housing, free healthcare, nursery and child care services (*Kindergarten*) and financial support after the working-life (Einborn 1994, 27). Some Italian visual artists worked at Universities and Art academies. At the same time, the GDR artists who could get support from the Communist regime were willing to exhibit their paintings in Italy and felt inspired by a country that was considered to be the cradle of the great art from antiquity to modern times.

As we have seen, some important art galleries of Northern and Centre Italy promoted the artworks of GDR artists, with the support of art curators and art critics such as, for example, Emilio Bentornati. Driven by their qualified sponsorship, Italian art market reacted positively to GDR artworks, especially those of Werner Tübke, and art dealers were able to make good profits. Finally, also some very important institutional actors such as the Biennale of Venice in the Eighties gave recognition to socialist realism of the GDR.

Our second point refers to the relationship between cultural exchange and emerg-

ing political strains and criticism. In some cases, visual artists criticized the political regime of the GDR, challenging its strict control of society.

The cultural exchange and the development of the relationship between visual artists of the two countries were often more complex than it could appear at a first sight. In many instances, artists were reluctant to submit themselves to the art policy of the Communist Parties in both countries, and travelling across borders gave them the opportunity to judge, compare and eventually dismiss ideological constraint.

While living in the GDR, Italian visual artists found it quite difficult to preserve their freedom of expression, especially if they tried artistic styles and topics that did not fully adhere to the directives of the Communist regime. Even those who were initially appreciated, such as Gabriele Mucchi, eventually incurred in censorship (Sandberg 1955)¹⁸. On the one hand Italian visual artists learned from their East German colleagues the subtle lesson of dissent, that is how to use their artistic means in order to challenge, criticize and resist the political regime. On the other hand, GDR artists, while coming in contact with Italian colleagues or during their brief staying in Italy, were confronted with a new interpretation of Marxist ideology and appreciated democratic rights of free expression.

A third point refers to the influence exerted by the exchange between visual artists of the two countries on the development of socialist realism in Italy and in the GDR. In this context, the role played by the different actors and institutions will briefly be examined as well.

It seems that the exchange in this sector didn't have an impact comparable with the results achieved in other artistic fields such as theatre or cinema, where neo-realism was largely dominant. If artistic results were relatively meagre, the ideological output was scarce as well. The political aim of socialist realism art conception, backed up by the Cultural Commission of the Italian Communist Party, was to awaken the collective consciousness of the working class and to induce workers to fight against capitalistic society, thus fostering the new socialist society. One cannot say it was a very successful strategy. Multiple reasons can explain this failure. We will recall the three major ones.

The first reason of such a failure depends on the weakening of the influence exerted by the Cultural Commission on visual artists. During the 1960s-1970s, the Cultural Commission of the PCI lost ground owing to a strong movement of left-wing art-

18. After many social recognition and appraisals for his engaged paintings, also from well-known art critics such as Herbert Sandberg and for his teaching (he was adjunct professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst Berlin-Weißensee since 1955), Gabriele Mucchi received strong criticism in the GDR, which were published in *Neues Deutschland*. In 1962 the attacks concerned his attempt «to rehabilitated Picasso in the Eastern Bloc and to defend the stylistic attempts of some local artists» (Guidali 2016, 98).

ists, such as the «Gruppo Forma 1» (Gómez Guitérrez 2015, 226), who claimed the autonomy of visual art from political power. Many important art critics, such as Bonito Oliva, favored a separation between art and politics, in order to preserve the right of the artist to his free expression. At the same time, an ever increasing influence of the mass media communication, such as television and the cinema, challenged strongly all visual artists, and confronted them with new languages and styles. A second reason for the political failure of socialist realism in Italy is linked with the great cultural and economic changes that invested the country after the Second World War. The impressive economic growth and the development of a more sophisticated consumer society enhanced values such as self-realization, focused on getting pleasure from consuming goods (and not only satisfying needs) and on obtaining more spare time. All signs of a widening individualism in strong opposition to the Marxist ideology (and also to Catholic norms based on piety and sacrifice), that made the political message of socialist realism to appear outdated and irrelevant.

A third reason for the scarce success of socialist realism among Italian artists – with some exceptions, the most notable of them being Renato Guttuso (1911-1987) – depends on the commodification of artworks and on the power of the art market. The artworks that attracted the most, also emotionally (Fine 2004, 225), the refined middle-upper class, were those related to the Western mainstream «conceptual arts», such as neo-dada, «arte povera» and pop art. The bourgeoisie had evidently its ideological reasons for discarding socialist realism. As it is well-known, taste is socially and politically influenced, if not determined¹⁹.

In the GDR the situation was quite different. Until the fall of the Berlin wall and notwithstanding the activity of some art galleries, the capitalistic art market was banned. The Communist Party and the Cultural Commission continued to control the visual artworks and gave clear directions. Artists didn't have to struggle in order to sell their artworks for making a living, because they were subsidized by the State. In exchange for this support, visual artists were expected to follow the guidelines of the Communist regime. It is true that some of them tried to find new art styles such as magical realism or even abstract conceptual art, thus resisting the interference of political power. Such a resistance meant for many of them to have their subsidies cut, to be marginalized and to be put under the constant control of the Stasi, the State security service.

19. Since the publication of Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, who stressed how taste, habitus and social classes are strongly intermingled, many studies confirmed a significant correlation between social classes and art preferences. Middle-upper social classes seem to prefer geometric abstractionism, while realism was the choice of lower-working class (Kavolis 1965). Nevertheless, recently, research has partially questioned this thesis, pointing out how also other factors are important in determining art preferences such as gender, ethnicity and religion.

The fourth, and last point concerns the impact of the fall of the GDR on the artists who had had a cultural exchange with their colleagues during the 1970s-1980s. Since the peaceful revolution and the disintegration of the German Democratic Republic in 1989, no one would speak of the artists of the GDR any more. However, even after the fall of the Berlin wall, differences are between artists born and raised in the GDR and those who grew up in the FRG clearly perceivable, as far as their socialization and artistic development are concerned.

On the basis of our first, and still quite sketchy biographical study on the visual artists who had had an exchange with their Italian colleagues, it seems possible to distinguish their fate after the fall of the GDR into three groups.

In the first group, we find those visual artists who were completely overwhelmed by the loss of their State subsidies and who had to strive hard in order to adjust themselves to the requirements of the art market. They were almost unable to sell their artworks on the market, to find art galleries and art critics who were willing to support them. Since most socialist realism artworks were now labeled as «ideological art», they did not attract any collector. Consequently, most artists belonging to the first group were obliged to find a different job in order to earn their lives. Hence, they were able to work as artists in their free time only. In this group, we find a high concentration of women visual artists, who had to struggle even harder than men after the reunification of East and West Germany (Mey 1994). Indeed, with the breakdown of the Communist regime, women visual artists lost not only their State subsidies but also all the childcare services for nursery and *Kindergarten* (100% of the childcare costs were paid by the State of East Germany) and the right to abortion during the first three months of pregnancy (Mey 1994, 88), that they were used to take for granted. According to Kerstin Mey «women are the losers of the reunification process» (88) (see also Adler and Brayfield 1996). Women-artists suffered a downward social mobility: unemployment, loss of social status, strong reduction in equality between men and women and rejection in the private sphere. This dramatic change in their lives had a hard impact on their artistic creativity and activity, which shrunk after reunification. Some visual artists developed a negative attitude and negative emotions such as embarrassment (Eisman 2014, 206) towards Western capitalistic and still patriarchal society. They became very critical and some of them even nostalgic of their life under the GDR.

At the same time, other visual artists, who had no contact with Italy during the GDR era, did eventually find after reunification their way to «the land where lemon-trees do bloom», as the famous definition of Italy by Goethe runs.

In this second group, we found those visual artists who were able to cope with the new political, social and economic situation. Some were even able to obtain

financial support from German and foreign institutions, thus being free to express what had been repressed under the Communist regime. An example of this kind of artistic «rebirth» is offered by Georg Dick (1971-2011)²⁰. Dick's artworks were profoundly inspired by religious subjects, something that would have been censored in the GDR. After the fall of the wall, he was attracted by Italy. Having obtained a financial support from the Italian-German Institute of Culture, he painted a chapel near Trapani.

To the third group belong the visual artists of the younger generation, who are influenced by Italy as well but strive to achieve a more international, more open renown. For many of them, the transition to the new way of life in a post-modern capitalistic society was less traumatic. After the «Wende» many art galleries, artistic associations and activities arose rapidly in the former GDR. The atmosphere in the art world was frantic and elated (Mey 1994, 83), especially in the cities of Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden. These visual artists were able to enter the art market and to understand its regulating norms. They managed to be supported by important art patrons, galleries, curators and art critics and to sell their artworks. Although their art style remains deeply rooted in the art schools of the GDR and in its realism, their works are strongly influenced by the new social and economic context. The case of the painter Neo Rauch²¹ of the New Leipziger School is emblematic. Owing to his magical realism, Rauch is today an acclaimed visual artist and has managed to turn his GDR curriculum into an international career not only in Europe but also in the United States.

20. Georg Dick (1971-2011) was born in 1971 in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz). From 1988 to 1991 he completed an apprenticeship as a tin plumber. Then he took evening classes at the Fachhochschule für angewandte Kunst Schneeberg. For about 15 years he studied woodcut, and only in a later phase he started painting. After the fall of the Berlin wall, in 1993 Dick received a scholarship from the Saxon Ministry of State for the Villa Casavaldi in Italy. Further stays abroad followed. From 1993 until 1994 he worked in Israel and from 1999 until 2000 he spent some times in Cuba. In the last years before his suicide, in 2011, a spiritual dimension emerged in his artworks, as opposed to both communist and materialist outlook. In 2009 Georg Dick held his exhibition named «A Church for Georg» in Valderice near Trapani in Sicily. He had painted the chapel of Villa Betania – with the support of the Italian-German Institute of Culture (Istituto di Cultura Italo-Tedesca).

21. Neo Rauch was born on April 18th, 1960. He grew up with his grand-parents in Aschersleben, near Magdeburg (Saxony-Anhalt), since his parents died in a train accident when he was only four weeks old. He graduated from the Erweiterten Oberschule «Thomas-Müntzer» (today Gymnasium Stephaneum). He studied painting at the Leipziger Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, first with Arno Rink from 1981 to 1986, then with Bernhard Heisig. From 1993 to 1998 he worked as an assistant to Arno Rink at the Leipzig Academy. From 2005 to 2009 he replaced Arno Rink as a professor at the Leipziger Hochschule. Neo Rauch was not only successful both as painter and scholar in the GDR but also in the art markets abroad. In 2000 his exhibition «Painting Art. Pittura d'oggi a Berlino» was shown at the «Fondazione Mudima» in Milan. A year later, he exhibited his image within the «Plateau of Mankind» at the Biennale di Venezia. The great economic success for Neo Rauch started in Europe and in the United States in the 1990s, when the New Leipziger School was included in the project «Young British Artists», financially supported by entrepreneur and art patron Charles Saatchi. Saatchi, grown up in a Jewish family from Irak, launched him on the international art market. Neo Rauch, supported also by the enthusiasm of art critics Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* (Ch. Links Verlag 2014, 80), then exposed his artworks in many important art galleries in the States, becoming one of the most popular and successful artists. The prices of his artworks «which combine real, narrative and dreamlike elements» (Spies and Tinterow 2007, 115) in the art market in the States are very high, if compared to those of the majority of artists. Today Neo Rauch lives in Leipzig with his wife and painter Rosa Loy.

From socialist realism to magic realism, the exchange between GDR visual artists and their Italian counterpart reflects the varying fortunes of history. What is now the former-GDR still nurtures both frustration and creativity, even if the old «good» days of State controlled art are rapidly fading away.

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