

Political Imagery from the Berlin Wall to German Unification

ICONS CLASH



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Exhibitions are collective enterprises and **ICONOCLASH** firmly fits into that category. The initial impetus for the show came after visiting the Wende Museum at the invitation of its director, Justinian Jampol, when I was in Los Angeles in early 2008. I was amazed by the museum's offerings and variety of objects. Its contents seemed destined to provide the foundation for an exhibition. After returning to Washington, DC, I suggested an exhibit to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall to the Goethe-Institut's then-director, Dr. Heribert Uschtrin. He enthusiastically agreed to host the exhibit. Justinian Jampol, co-curator of this exhibit, and the Wende Museum's staff likewise agreed to loan objects.

In January, 2009, the new Goethe-Institut director, Dr. Ulrich Braess, immediately concurred with the decision to host the show. Along with Sylvia Blume and Norma Broadwater, two of the most indefatigable staffers around, we outlined its perimeters. Many thanks to Anna-Maria Furlong who created the catalogue design. In addition, William Gilcher and the other members of the Board of the Friends of the Goethe-Institut helped the process go forward by agreeing to provide the financial support to make the project possible. Thanks go to the current and former staff of the Wende Museum, including Yelena Kravtsova, Ljiljana Grubisic, Silke Hilger, Carlos Ortega, and Carlos Mijangos for being so helpful and providing wonderful suggestions. The Wende Museum's director, himself a historian, has been the ever-enthusiastic collaborator from the start.

Even during these shaky economic times, two German political foundations, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Social Democratic Party) and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Green Party) have generously contributed funding. We sincerely thank them for their support. We also thank the Friends of the Goethe-Institut, Washington, DC, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, and George Mason University

Marion Deshmukh, George Mason University

**“Now a lot of what we
left behind will return.
And probably what made us
leave the GDR will return
most quickly.”**

- Lutz Dammbeck, artist, 1997

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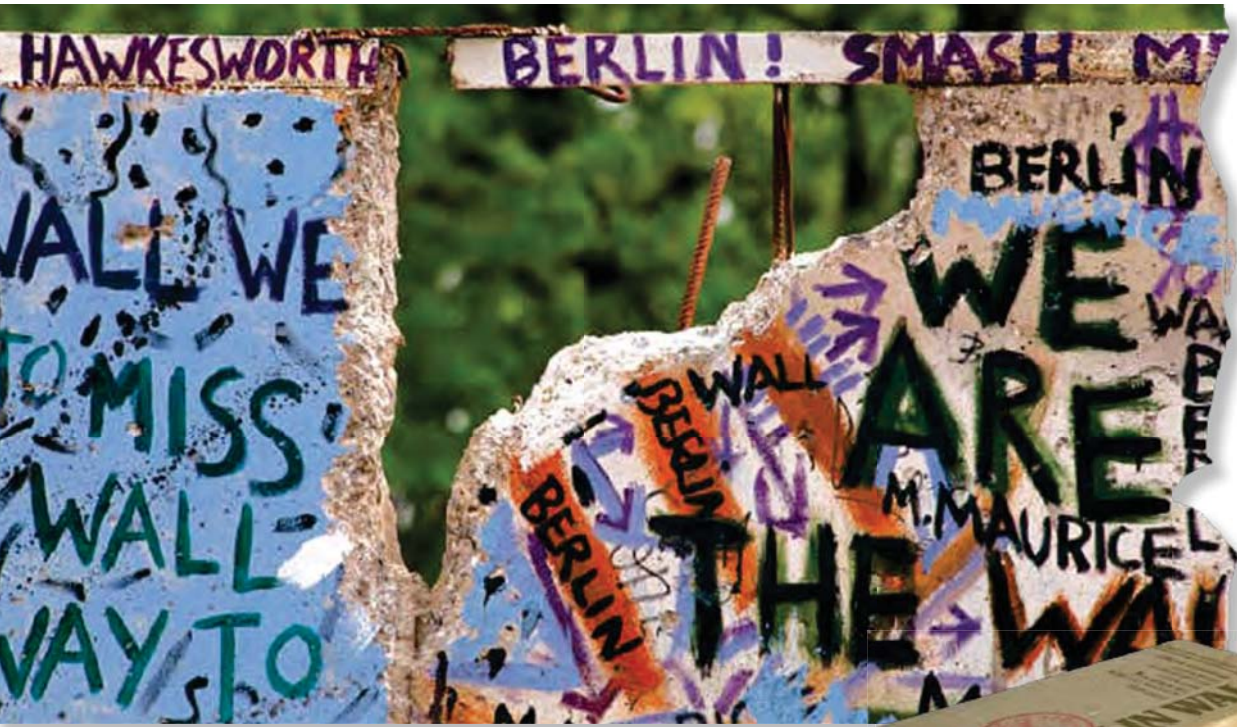




ICQI OGLASH!

Political Imagery from the Berlin Wall to German Unification

Marion Deshmukh, George Mason University



Berlin Wall Fragment

Robinsons-May Department Store Berlin Wall Souvenir, United States of America, 1989.



Tourists traveling to Berlin today expecting to find many and prominently-visible chunks of the Berlin Wall will be disappointed. Stone and metal pavers have been placed in the areas where the wall used to stand. Only a few rather minimal remnants of the massive structure that girded West Berlin between 1961 and 1989 remain. In fact, it may be far easier to see substantial sections of the wall in Washington, DC, at the Reagan Building or in the Newseum rather than making a pilgrimage to Berlin. For nearly three decades, from its erection to its demolition, the wall divided the city and literally symbolized East-West confrontation during the Cold War. That long-smoldering war ended with the sound of hammers and chisels removing the metaphoric Iron Curtain Winston Churchill described immediately after World War II. In a now-iconic speech given at Westminster College in Missouri in 1946, the former British prime minister warned of increasing and potential dangerous confrontations between Eastern Europe, dominated by the Communist Soviet Union and Western Europe, protected by the umbrella of liberal democracies, notably the United States and Great Britain.

It has now been twenty years, almost a generation, since the fall of the Wall. For those born in the 1980s to the present, the Berlin Wall may seem to be an artifact of ancient history, similar to memorials of World War I or even the Napoleonic era. The changing meanings of the Wall since 1989 have been instructive in understanding how people come to terms with momentous historic events. In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, Germans coined a very long word that summarized their historic reflection of their Nazi past: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or “coming to terms with the past.” The German term used to “work through” the more recent dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic is known as *Aufarbeitung*.

How have the Germans thought about the wall and what it represented over time? What have been the changing images and ideas, visual and verbal, expressing these sentiments? This exhibit attempts to show one significant cultural aspect of the wall, namely the trajectory of images and objects that began as political icons during the era of the Cold War and often ended up as commodities to be sold at flea markets or department stores. In the immediate aftermath of 1989 and the subsequent unification of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic into a united Germany, hundreds of objects of high and low culture and politics were removed, destroyed or literally trashed, only worthy to be thrown into the metaphorical dustbin of history. The ideas of Karl Marx, the nineteenth century German founder of Communism, were roundly discredited in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ironically a quotation by Marx partly encapsulates the theme of this exhibit: “A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”

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Composite of street signs bearing the names of Communist luminaries, such as Engels and Thaelmann along with East German leaders, such as Grotewohl. The streets were renamed after reunification. Metal alloy, c. 1970, 90 x 70 cm

The film *Goodbye Lenin* (2003) also comically captured this sentiment. In it, a loyal and idealistic functionary of the GDR suffered a temporary coma during the momentous time the wall fell and only regained consciousness in 1990. Her son, worried that she would suffer fatal health consequences should she learn her beloved GDR no longer existed, frantically scurries throughout Berlin to collect objects of the old regime. These included pickle jars to furniture, clothing to children's toys. By recuperating in her apartment surrounded by the artifacts of the German Democratic Republic, the mother would regain her health. Once recovered, her son could then gently inform her of the fact that her beloved country had vanished! Thus commodities, while appearing trivial, held important symbolic values, some of which would be later disparaged as nostalgia.

Most East Germans happily discarded their everyday possessions to buy western consumer items, treasured but unobtainable before 1990. From the much-maligned east German car, the *Trabant*, to GDR paintings prominently displayed in art museums, East German items were now seen as having little or no value and hence, disposable. Six months before the official unification of Germany in 1990, the director of East Berlin's National Gallery of Art, Peter Betthausen noted:

For me, the German Democratic Republic is now a closed chapter. It was an experiment that failed. True, for a while I helped write that chapter....but especially in the last year or two, I've known there was no future for this system or this country. However, please don't ask me how it will change. I am an art historian, not a prophet.¹

Curators, often brought in from West German museums, took down GDR paintings that they viewed as propaganda rather than art. One could visit weekend flea markets throughout Berlin and purchase, often cheaply, everything from military uniforms to portraits of former government officials, such as Eric Honecker.

While a certain amount of what the Germans call *Ostalgie*, or nostalgic remembrance of life during the GDR regime has surfaced since unification, irreverence towards the East German legacy remains. This can be seen in the manner in which images and objects have been transformed during the twenty years from their original intent as serious objects of veneration and respect to objects of consumption and satire. Even though a generation has passed since the Wall's demolition, Germans are still working through the myriad of implications of unification. Hence this exhibition attempts to contextualize how images are created but then can be manipulated and altered as the political, economic, social and cultural environment wherein they were first created change over time. Within the exhibition space of the Goethe-Institut, we have tried to show these transformations and have offered a variety of objects—from political party posters and portraits to flags, street signs, party pins, and as fragments of the Berlin Wall itself—as documents of dizzying historical change.



Scene from the 2003 film, *Goodbye Lenin*.
© Sony Picture Classics



East German leader Erich Honecker in prison stripes.

¹Quoted in *ARTnews*, (May, 1990), 160.



East German May Day Parade, c.1980



Unused East German banners and flags, 1989

Today it is incredible to comprehend how swiftly the East German regime fell after forty years in power from its creation in 1949 to its demise in 1989. One historian has even suggested that the “German Democratic Republic may eventually rate merely a historical footnote, having occupied little of Germany’s geography and chronology.”² Within the space of a few short months in 1989, the German Democratic Republic was undermined by several concurrent developments. In the summer, Hungary, another Soviet bloc country, opened its borders to Austria. Since East Germans could not travel to the West unless they were over the age of sixty-five and retired or traveled on official state business prior to 1989, young East Germans saw the Hungarian-Austrian border as the passageway to economic and possibly political freedom. Hundreds began to travel to Hungary and then onwards to West Germany via Austria during the summer. What began as a trickle turned to a veritable flood of humanity.

Meanwhile, the GDR government prepared for grand celebrations of its 40th birthday anniversary scheduled for October. Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian leader who implemented the transformative policies of *Glasnost* (openness, governmental transparency) and *Perestroika* (governmental reform) in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, was to be the star attraction to congratulate the East Germans. His review of the massive parades planned for the ceremonies would provide the centerpiece and culmination of these celebratory events. But by October, when the commemoration festivities began, shouts of “Gorby,” “Gorby” in the manner of rock star groupies was seen by observers very differently. Gorbachev now represented a country which attempted reform.



Graffiti spelling out “Openness now”
©. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

² Mark Allinson, “The Failed Experiment: East German Communism,” in Mary Fulbrook (ed.), *20th Century Germany, Politics, Culture and Society, 1918-1990*, (London, 2001), 204.



Portrait of Leonid Brezhnev
Oil on Canvas,
c. 1960
80 x 60cm

A cult of personality symbol of the communist regime, this print of Leonid Brezhnev's (Head of State, 1964 to 1982, USSR) portrait was used by German citizens in demonstrations immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall.



Portraits of Leonid Brezhnev
Print on Paper, c. 1989
90 x 70 cm



Portrait of Erich Honecker,
Color Print on Canvas,
c. 1980, 45 x 35 cm

The color portrait of Erich Honecker (Head of State 1971- 1989, GDR) would have hung in schools, shops and the office of functionaries across the GDR during his administration. After the fall of the Wall, and indicted in the death of over 180 East Germans, Honecker fled first to Moscow, then to Chile, and passed away at age 81 before having to stand trial.



Portrait of Erich Honecker
Print on Paper, c. 1989, 90 x 70 cm
The pseudo-inscription sarcastically reflects this progression: " Fond Greetings from Moscow/Chile/Hell?".

The East German population saw an opportunity to reform themselves along the lines of the USSR. However the GDR leadership, isolated and immune to criticism, saw little need to alter their authoritarian policies. Weekly street demonstrations in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden by nascent opposition groups, such as the Protestant clergy, environmentalists, students, intellectuals and alternative parties, sprang up overnight during the months of September and October, accelerating the exit of the GDR hierarchy. By early November, the East German government scrambled to salvage their legitimacy by offering concessions to the protesters. One concession inadvertently and accidentally announced was a response to a reporter's question. A leading East German government spokesman, Günther Schabowski, announced a new regulation, immediately allowing GDR citizens to leave the country through any of the border crossings. While the easing of travel restrictions had been debated, no definite policy had been officially decided by the political leadership. Hence the reporter's question on November 9th literally brought down the wall. Shouts of "We are the people" to cries of "We are a **united** people" (*Wir sind das Volk, Wir sind ein Volk*) resonated among the East German population.



Demonstrations in the GDR

By the beginning of 1990, the West German government led by its Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, was conferring with the four allied powers that occupied Germany at the end of World War II: the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. What evolved as the "2 Plus 4" agreement officially ended World War II, signed by the two Germanys together with the four wartime era allies. Germany now could unify as a sovereign state embedded in the larger European Union. Currency reforms were implemented in the summer of 1990. On October 3, 1990 Germany officially was recognized as a unified Federal Republic with five former provinces of the GDR incorporated into the enlarged sovereign state. In less than one year, the German Democratic Republic shrank from an internationally recognized Communist country to a regional geographical section within the democratic Federal Republic. In actual fact, East Germany ceased to exist. Its political, social, economic institutions were discredited. These included collective farms, state-run factories, universities, and the entire government apparatus, from the infamous secret police (known as the Stasi) to the Socialist Unity Party (SED) which rebranded itself as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in order to avoid the stigma of defeat. A 1994 commissioned parliamentary report suggested that "those forces which were decisive in organizing the repression of people in the GDR never again receive a political chance in united Germany."³

With what some contemporary commentators termed a "hostile takeover" of East Germany by West Germany, there began a literal and figurative house cleaning. Professors who taught subjects such as Marxism-Leninism were removed from their teaching positions at universities in the east. Party leaders were interrogated and, in some cases, arrested and put on trial for state crimes. State-run factories were shuttered or bought by West German or international purchasers at bargain prices. Hope and fear coexisted simultaneously for those East Germans who had occupied positions of power but also among the general population as well. What would East Germany's future be under the tutelage of the West Germans?

³ Deutsche Bundestag, 12, Wahlperiode 12/7820, 31.5.1994, "Bericht der Enquete-Kommission, "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland," 5, quoted in Allinson, 204.



Bust of V. I. Lenin
Plaster and Paint, c. 1960
Busts of V. I. Lenin, were mass-produced in the 1960's, painted to resemble bronze, and displayed throughout the GDR as a testament of loyalty to the teachings of Marx and Lenin, and the presumed fraternal ties with the Soviet Union.



Bust of V. I. Lenin
Plaster and Paint, c. 1960, November 1989
Originally identical to the one above it, this bust was altered with West German paint during a Leipzig Demonstration in October 1989 as the East German regime was collapsing.

Television flashed images of East German caravans of Trabant cars crossing into Berlin and West Germany greeted by champagne-bearing welcome committees. These euphoric scenes soon changed into pictures and stories of disappointed “Ossies” (East Germans) without work and without a clear future. “Wessies” (West Germans) began complaining about high taxes that subsidized the unification process. The difficulties, complications and setbacks suggested that a smooth transition towards binding the German states seamlessly appeared unlikely or illusive.

While Germans continued to make strides in coming to terms with their Nazi past following unification, some Germans seemed less eager to confront the recent past that spoke of division between capitalism and communism. In the immediacy of unification, the dominant mode of reflection was to erase ideas as well as tangible objects connected to the GDR. This recent past is still being “worked through.”

Capitalists capitalized on selling off artifacts of the former country. These ranged from an oversupply of East German flags, manufactured to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the GDR in 1989, to a wide array of pins that were often given out at ceremonial occasions. Statues of leaders—such as the iconic founder of Leninism to portraits and posters of other Russians quickly disappeared from public view. Soon one could either find these objects, along with posters, paintings, household appliances, furniture and other detritus of the GDR in trash bins or for sale along the streets of central Berlin. In some cases, graffiti artists reworked posters, signs, and flags and transformed them into objects of satire or objects of consumption, such as soda bottles or t-shirts. This exhibition showcases a few of the literally thousands of material objects that have been salvaged and preserved by the Wende Museum in Los Angeles, the lender to this exhibition.



Image of the East German Trabant (“Trabi”) smashing through the Wall



Portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev, 1987



Portraits of Mikhail Gorbachev on sale, 1990



7,- DM

Михаил Сергеевич ГОРБАЧЕВ

Color 10,-
Couleur 10,-

The print on the far left was intended for distribution just as Gorbachev's reforms solidified. A few short years later, in the midst of rapid change and the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev's portraits (center, right), went on sale at a bargain price. The Soviet leader himself appears to be a capitalist commodity.

All the objects displayed come from the enormous collection of Cold War objects located in the Wende Museum in Culver City, a suburb embedded within greater metropolitan Los Angeles, California. Several questions are immediately raised about the collection. First, why are these artifacts located in southern California and not in Germany and the former Soviet Bloc countries? Secondly, what is the significance of the collection? Third, why collect these objects?

In the wake of unification and during the upheavals throughout eastern Europe and the USSR, many persons, particularly those who had suffered as political dissidents or had been targets of governmental surveillance, wished to close an unhappy chapter of their lives in the GDR by removing materials that reminded them of this history. Buildings, particularly the hated Berlin *Stasi* headquarters and branch offices located throughout East Germany, were trashed before officials realized that an important historic record could disappear. The government established an archival commission that attempted to preserve, catalogue, and store the miles of documents generated by the secret state security police. From the offices of the communist party hierarchy to the small apartments of the average East German citizen, objects were seen as no longer useful and hence, disposable.

In 2002, the Wende Museum was established in Culver City. Its founder and director, Justinian Jampol, has developed the important mission of collecting, preserving, and cataloguing the literally thousands of objects that the museum received from organizations and individuals in Europe and the former Soviet Union.⁴ Why the museum is located in Los Angeles, rather than in Germany, another country in Eastern Europe or Russia is equally instructive. Some have suggested that the geographical and ideological distance halfway around the world means that interested visitors can examine the stored artifacts and learn about a period of history that had crucial importance globally. They can do so in surroundings relatively free from the debates still taking place in Germany about the history of the GDR and the role the building of the wall played both within East Germany and beyond. Additionally, there are still Central Europeans who remain unconvinced about the historic or cultural value of artifacts that exist in abundance in the eastern German states. Preserving these objects holds no interest to them—objects that the Wende Museum is in the process of cataloguing and archiving for present and future use.



Gallery, Wende Museum, Culver City, California



A small selection of the thousands of pins given out to factory workers, students, and others during ceremonies in the GDR.

⁴ See Arnold Bartetzky, "Lenins Asyl unter Kaliforniens Himmel," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 July 2009, Number 158, Z3.



The GDR placed ominous sign warnings against trespassing and photography in a restricted zone at the Friedrich - Zimmer - Strasse / Checkpoint Charlie Border Crossing.



Sheet metal sign
50 x 66cm
Back

In 1990 the GDR no longer exuded authority, and the reverse side of the sign (above) became a hand - lettered advertisement for souvenirs at the Wall ("Have your passports stamped with an authentic GDR stamp").



Sheet metal sign
50 x 66cm
Front

Most historians rely on documents and texts for understanding a historical epoch—from treaties, government memos, letters, diaries, and other printed materials. Those engaged in visual studies often examine paintings, photographs, and film to understand the cultural and occasionally political meanings of an era. The Wende Museum’s holdings are especially rich in both visual and textual items. Its contents include an incredible range of items—from Soviet era textbooks, cookbooks and magazines aimed at the general population to posters, party flags, dishes, musical instruments, paintings, and more. Preserved and catalogued according to museum standards, the collection is a treasure-trove of primary documentation that will be invaluable to current and future scholars.

In the aftermath of World War II, the allied powers responsible for Germany’s defeat captured Nazi party archives and governmental documents. Each of the four occupying countries then transferred these captured documents to their respective nations. In the case of the captured war documents in American custody after 1945, a decision was made to microfilm everything—whether critical to Germany’s history or seemingly trivial.⁵ The philosophy espoused by historians entrusted with the task of microfilming was that later generations may find documents which, at the time, seemed unimportant but that later would be crucial in understanding the period. This proved to be a correct assessment. World War II documents have been unearthed that have led to war crimes trials, to settling restitution claims and to a more nuanced and textured history of the Nazi past. Hence, the philosophy of retaining materials related to the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, however insignificant they may now seem to be, is equally important for future historians and observers of this critical era.

From the thousands of images and objects, those selected for the Goethe-Institut exhibition fall into five main categories. One section displays portraits of Soviet and East German leaders such as Leonid Brezhnev, Erich Honecker, and Mikhail Gorbachev together with their transformation as objects of ridicule or satire at the time of the Wende. By the turn of the century, advertising agencies recast some communist Cold War protagonists into capitalist marketing tools. For example, in 2005, Pizza Hut created a TV ad depicting Russian customers arguing over the virtues of political and economic reform. Meanwhile, Gorbachev is contently eating a slice of pizza with his grandchild. In 2007, the high-end French luggage maker, Louis Vuitton, ran a highly visible print and television advertisement showing Gorbachev being driven in a stretch limousine by the Berlin Wall. By his side is a large, and seemingly expensive Vuitton satchel.

⁴ See the extended discussion of the decision-making process in microfilming German captured war documents in: Gerhard L. Weinberg, “German Documents in the United States,” *Central European History*, 41:4, 2008, 555-567, particularly p. 561.



GDR-era election posters

Often election posters contained wordy exhortations, such as “The restoration of German unity is, above all, a concern of the German people, the east and west Germans.”



Election posters from the early 1990's



Election posters during the Wende emphasized freedom, unity and prosperity and condemned socialism.



Contemporary German election posters

Recent posters continue to emphasize unity and freedom.

Statues of Lenin became altered through spray painting and were reproduced as logos on t-shirts and soft drink bottles. Another section highlights the precipitous devaluation of former objects of GDR veneration, in particular, the national flag and commemorative pins given out at official occasions. Literally thousands of flags were manufactured for the 40th anniversary celebrations, scheduled for October, 1989. Flags were to be displayed, used in marches and officially organized events. However, these planned events quickly unraveled and the celebrations turned to protest demonstrations and insistent calls for reform; the flags became superfluous or would be incorporated into the protests. Likewise, the commemorative pins handed out at countless occasions, such as school assemblies, factories reaching target quotas, or sporting matches remained in their original boxes, having lost all meaning.

A third section of the exhibit displays the variety of political posters, ranging from the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), to the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) to the Green Party. A plethora of posters materialized in the wake of elections during the unification process. They took on the design features of West German party campaigning, in stark contrast to the sober, text-filled election posters of the GDR. Yet, another transformation from 1989 to the present can be seen in street signs that harked to a socialist past removed in favor of names from the pre-World War II era or new names entirely.

The centerpiece and symbolic center of the exhibit is, naturally, chunks of the Berlin Wall. Since its erection in 1961, the wall stood for ideological division between the communist east and the democratic west. The wall separated families and a formerly-united country. While the GDR leadership consistently defined the wall as an “anti-fascist” barrier to keep East Germans free from the unhealthy influences of the Federal Republic, western ideas and popular culture, West Germans and NATO allies saw the wall as a prison perimeter, forcing East Germans to unwillingly remain in their country. Several US presidents, most famously, John Kennedy in 1963 and Ronald Reagan in 1987 spoke to crowds in West Berlin, extolling the city’s grit and perseverance. Kennedy’s cry, “Ich bin ein Berliner,” and Reagan’s admonition to Gorbachev to “Tear down this wall,” served as iconic events in Berlin’s postwar history.⁶ Given the half-century of serving as the symbolic epicenter of Cold War tensions, Berlin still resonates as a city between east and west. During the 2008 presidential campaign, the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama spoke and exclaimed: “This city of all cities knows the dream of freedom....People of the world looked at Berlin where a wall came down, a continent came together and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one.”⁷



Collection of Busts, Wende Museum, Culver City, California



Softdrink Bottle “Leninade”, 2008

Though the image of Lenin remains venerated by some and ridiculed by others, with in the last several years it has become an ironic commodity for youth culture - appearing on soft drinks, t-shirts, and lunch boxes.

⁶ See Andreas Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, (Cambridge, UK, 2008)

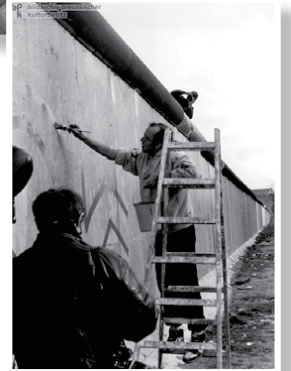
⁷ Barack Obama, Speech of July 24, 2008. Berlin



Fortification of Stone Wall, July 1963.
© Bildarchiv PK



American artist Keith Haring painting on the Berlin Wall, 1986, with East German Guards photographing the scene.
© BPK/Oskar Dahlke



Celebrations at the Wall in front of the Reichstag. The photo was taken on Oct. 3, 1990, the first Day of German Unity.
© Bundespresseamt Bildstelle 85715-22a

The fragments of the wall on display show how West German painters and graffiti artists viewed the concrete barriers through painted slogans and images. GDR officials forbade any “defamation” of the wall. In fact, it was virtually impossible to reach the wall from the eastern section of Berlin given the no-man’s land of the barbed wire, land mines and police with patrolling German shepherd dogs, continually checking for those trying to leave the country. Those who attempted to escape were shot by border guards with orders to kill.

The wall fragments displayed are 4th generation pieces. The first generation consisted basically of barbed wire and hastily constructed bricks and mortar. More elaborate revisions of the basic structure continued during the early years after the initial construction in August, 1961. In the mid-1970s, large concrete slabs provided a continuous flat surface, allowing artists on the western side of the wall to paint graffiti and colorful images that sought to give meaning to Germany’s division. A 5th generation design for the wall was planned for the year 2000. Obviously, the momentous events of 1989 intervened!

Once the wall was breached on the night of November 9, 1989, it no longer remained the formidable and feared obstruction. Thousands of individuals flocked to it, chipping away at it and making off with pieces ranging from large to tiny souvenirs, sold as Christmas gifts in department stores. Several variations of these wall souvenirs are part of the exhibition.



Wall with guard tower, surveillance cameras, and other monitoring equipment



Berlin Wall Fragment



Checkpoint at Bernauerstrasse, November 12, 1989. © picture-alliance, dpa

Now, exactly twenty years after the Wall's demise, the unification of a divided Germany, and the end of the Cold War that resulted from these momentous events, how can one assess the Wall's cultural meanings? On one level, walls of all sorts have played a critical role in history and in the development of civilizations, from the Great Wall of China, the wall around the ancient city of Athens during its disastrous encounters with the Spartans in the 5th century BC, and Hadrian's Wall in England, to medieval walls protecting the European castles of barons, counts and kings. The citizens of the Byzantine Empire's capital, Constantinople, assumed that their walls would protect them from Ottoman invaders. Walls divide the Cypriot Turks from the Greek Cypriots.

Walls are currently being built to separate the Palestinians from the Israelis, the Mexicans from the Americans, all in the name of economic, political, and social "peace." A question must be raised, however, when reviewing the history of the Berlin Wall. That question is: do people thrive when separated or when joined together? The Berlin of today is certainly a better, more economically viable, culturally attractive capital of one Germany than it was as a divided city separated by concrete slabs. And a united Germany embedded within the European Union is undoubtedly a more vibrant nation than when East and West Germany served as literal and symbolic flashpoints of the Cold War. Hence the exhibit can serve as a cautionary tale of how quickly seemingly impregnable barriers can crumble and change the course of history. The exhibit can also alert us to the way what once were icons of history—portraits, sculpture, banners and flags promoting values held critical, if not sacred by its nation's leadership—can, through satire, humor and the human spirit, demonstrate that the one overarching historical given is change and transformation.



Berlin Wall Fragment

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1961-1990

TIME LINE

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AUGUST, 1961

The Berlin Wall erected

1968

Student demonstrations in West Germany. GDR adopts a constitution privileging the role of the ruling party, the SED (Socialist Unity Party)



© DHM
(German Historical Museum)
AK 96/612

1969

Chancellorship of Willy Brandt in West Germany under a coalition of the left-leaning Social Democratic Party, (SPD) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP)

1970

Willy Brandt (SPD) and East German leader Willi Stoph (SED) meet.

1971

Walter Ulbricht is replaced by Erich Honecker as the leader of the SED Party in East Germany.



1972

Signing of the Basic Treaty between the GDR and the FRG.

1973

Basic treaty ratified by West German parliament, the Bundestag. Both East and West Germany become members of the United Nations.

1984

A visit by Erich Honecker to West Germany is cancelled

1985

Mikhail Gorbachev becomes the leader of the Soviet Union.

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1989

SUMMER: East Germans flee west after Hungary opens its border with Austria.

SEPTEMBER

Establishment of New Forum, alternative political group
Weekly street demonstrations in Leipzig



OCTOBER

Gorbachev visits Berlin for East Germany's 40th anniversary, admonishing Honecker to begin reforms.
Honecker is removed from office and replaced by Egon Krenz
Demonstrations take place throughout East Germany.



© Gesellschaft ueber Frieden und Verstaendigung zwischen der Sowjetunion und der westlichen Welt. Thomas Soltész, Olga International, Haus der Geschichte, Bonn, Eb-Nr. 1990/8/134

NOVEMBER

The governing body of the GDR, the Politburo, resigns.
The Berlin Wall is opened on 9 November.
At the end of the month, Kohl proclaims a 10 Point Plan for Germany.
The SED renounces its leadership claim.
Establishment of an interim government, known as the "Round Table."

1987

Honecker visits the Federal Republic

1990

Two Plus Four talks begin.

MARCH

Elections held, bringing the GDR into a conservative coalition government.

JULY

Currency union with West Germany.



OCTOBER 3

GDR united with the Federal Republic.



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DECEMBER

Helmut Kohl re-elected Chancellor of a united Germany

EXHIBITION

CHECKLIST

1. **Platz der Thälmann-Pioniere Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
7 x 39 in.
2009.104.001
2. **Straße d. Thälmann-Pioniere Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
6 x 33 in.
2009.104.002
3. **Ernst Thälmann Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
6 x 31 in.
2009.900.204
4. **Albert Schweitzer Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
6 x 33 in.
2009.900.207
5. **Friedrich Engels Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
6 x 33 in.
2009.900.205
6. **Otto Grotewohl Street Sign**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1970
Enameled metal
6 x 33 in.
2009.900.206
7. **Portrait of Leonid Brezhnev**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1960
Oil on canvas
31 x 23 in.
2007.278.006
8. **Portrait of Leonid Brezhnev**
Why!
German Democratic Republic, c. 1989
Print on cardboard
35 x 27 in.
2008.045.001
9. **Portrait of Leonid Brezhnev**
Not!
German Democratic Republic, c. 1989
Print on cardboard
35 x 27 in.
2008.045.004
10. **Portrait of Erich Honecker**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1980
Serigraph on canvas
22 x 16 in.
2009.900.203
11. **Portrait of Erich Honecker**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1989
Print on cardboard
32 x 22 in.
2008.045.002
12. **Bust of V.I. Lenin**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1960
Plaster and paint
20 x 16 x 14 in.
2004.900.051
13. **Bust of V.I. Lenin**
Painted pink and green
German Democratic Republic, c. 1960
(modified on Nov. 1989)
Plaster and paint
20 x 16 x 14 in.
2004.900.052
14. **Punk Lenin T-shirt**
United Kingdom, 2009
Serigraph on cotton
29 x 34 in.
2009.620.001
15. **Leninade Soda Bottle**
United States of America, 2009
Glass bottle
9 (H) x 2 in. (Dia)
2009.900.383
16. **Portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev**
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1987
Print on paper
27 x 19 in.
2005.900.412
17. **Portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev**
On sale 7,- DM
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1990
Print on paper
26 x 19 in.
2005.900.413
18. **Portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev**
On sale 3,- DM
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1990
Print on paper
19 x 13 in.
2005.900.310

19. **4th Generation Wall Section**
Commodified and sold
German Democratic Republic, 1990
Concrete in plastic case
3 x 3 x 3 in.
2009.900.217
20. **4th Generation Wall Section**
Western side, piece “pecked” out
German Democratic Republic, 1975
Concrete with reinforced steel
31 x 15 x 3 in.
2009.900.700
21. **Robinson's May Berlin Wall Souvenir**
United States of America, 1989
Cardboard, glass, nylon, and concrete
5 x 3 x 3 in.
2008.021.001
22. **Grenzgebiet Sign**
German Democratic Republic, n.d.
Metal Sheet
19 x 27 x 1 in.
2009.900.360
23. **Sperrgebiet Sign**
German Democratic Republic, n.d.
Fiberboard
19 x 26 in.
2009.900.202
24. **GDR Era Election Poster of Wilhelm Elfes**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1964
Print on paper
10 x 14 in.
2006.900.015
25. **GDR Era Election Poster of Nikolai Michailowitsch Schwernik**
German Democratic Republic, 1952
Print on paper
12 x 33 in.
2006.900.016
26. **FDJ Poster**
German Democratic Republic, n.d.
Print on paper
9 x 22 in.
2005.900.309
27. **CDU Poster**
Federal Republic of Germany, 1990
Print on paper
33 x 24 in.
2005.900.337
28. **PDS Poster**
Federal Republic of Germany, 1990
Print on paper
32 x 22 in.
2005.900.335
29. **Allianz für Deutschland DA, DSU, CDU Poster**
German Democratic Republic, 1990
Print on paper
33 x 23 in.
2005.900.336
30. **Berlin ist Freiheit SPD Poster**
German Democratic Republic, 1989
Print on paper
23 x 32 in.
2009.900.743
31. **Aufschwung durch Einheit SPD Poster**
German Democratic Republic, 1989
Print on paper
22 x 33 in.
2009.900.744
32. **Berlin Braucht Grün Poster**
German Democratic Republic, 1990
Print on paper
46 x 32 in.
2009.900.745
33. **Embroidered Banner on Pole**
German Democratic Republic, n.d.
Nylon and metal
125 (H) x 1 in. (Dia), pole
47 x 69 in., banner
2008.900.470
34. **Bundle of Banners**
German Democratic Republic, 1989
Nylon
6 x 10 x 4 in.
2009.900.746
35. **Banner with East German Emblem Removed**
German Democratic Republic, 1989
Nylon
48 x 120 in.
2009.900.357
36. **Ernst Thälmann Broken Bust**
German Democratic Republic, c. 1975
Multiple pins attached to it
Metal and plaster
58 x 16 x 16 in.
2009.900.742



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