

"GDR ON THE PACIFIC": (RE)PRESENTING EAST GERMANY IN LOS ANGELES*

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In January 2009, Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), with the aid of art historian Eckhart Gillen of the Kunstprojekte-Berlin, launched the exhibition *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*. Building on the success of Barron's earlier German-themed LACMA exhibitions, this was the inaugural event of the brand new, palm-tree-lined Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) building, designed by architect Renzo Piano. Barron and Gillen featured artwork from both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic and placed the images on equal footing, allowing them to share wall space in the same gallery halls. At first glance, an exhibition that compares and contrasts art from the two Germanys might be deemed an unusual choice for the inaugural event in a new \$56-million institution in Los Angeles. Given, however, LACMA's extensive collection of German art and an audience accustomed to being challenged by German art, the Los Angeles public subjected the decision to little scrutiny.¹ Responses in German curatorial circles were markedly different; the exhibition's juxtaposition of East and West German art gave rise to considerable commentary and critique. While the design of the exhibition was a point of interest in the United States, with American journalists expressing surprise that quality art had been produced in the GDR, it became a major story in Germany, where East German art had long been disregarded and denigrated.²

The reception and instrumentalization of twentieth-century German art within Germany has been heavily influenced by contemporary politics, and the collapse of the GDR offered yet another opportunity for a reassessment of its legacy. The debates and arguments over the past—specifically regarding what the GDR *means*—have often coalesced within the realm of culture, including the iconography, art, architecture, and everyday material culture associated with the former East Germany.³ The tone is rarely neutral. Charges of neo-colonialism, for example, were levied against the reunified German government for attempting to replace the East German *Ampelmännchen* (GDR traffic-light figures alternately indicating

1 International interest in the New Leipzig School was fueled by American collectors such as the Rubbell family and critics from the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. See Arthur Lubow, "The New Leipzig School," *New York Times*, January 8, 2006; and Peter Schjeldahl, "Paintings for Now," *New Yorker*, June 4, 2007.

2 Michael Kimmelman, "Art in Two Germanys Often Spoke the Same Tongue," *New York Times*, January 12, 2009.

3 See Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1998); Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, 2008); and Mark Landmann, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

when to walk and wait) with their West German counterparts, which sport a distinctly different and less playful design. Similarly, heated public protests have erupted over the destruction of significant GDR architectural landmarks, most notably the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic). Within the curatorial world, institutions and individuals that deal in or collect East German art objects are often dismissed as being engaged in uncritical nostalgia, or *Ostalgie*.

As keepers and interpreters of culture, museums have emerged as central subjects of these debates, whether passively, through their validation of particular normative perspectives, or actively, as in the case of several museum exhibitions that have subsequently drawn ire and rebuke.⁴ Such issues are by no means confined to public gallery halls; they also determine activities in the private backrooms of curatorial institutions. German museums have become involved in the process of reclassifying large portions of East German art as historical material, prioritizing their historical value while simultaneously denying their status as “art.”⁵ As a result, tens of thousands of paintings have been relocated to warehouses or *Kunstdepots* in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt over the last twenty years.

As these limited examples demonstrate, museums—be they focused on art, culture, or history—impose, reflect, and shape cultural value and are therefore inescapably political entities. In deciding what and how to exhibit, they determine what is worthy of preserving, what is excluded, and what is disregarded as kitsch. Such decisions are influenced by a range of factors that include economic, cultural, and emotional considerations. While problematic negotiations of the past are not limited to Germany, the region perhaps presents a special case.⁶ Victimization and repression are central components of German identity, tropes that have reemerged in recent narratives of the GDR. There has been a spate of memorials built to commemorate victims of communism, for example,⁷ while grant-making organizations have been established to support projects and initiatives examining communist oppression.⁸ This post-*Wende*

4 For a discussion of different approaches, see Jonathan Osmond's account of the 1999 exhibition *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* in Weimar and the 2003 *Kunst in der DDR* exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin: “German Art Collections and Exhibits since 1989,” in *Art Outside the Lines*, ed. Kelly and Wlodarski.

5 For example, the artworks housed in the Palast der Republik, representing some of the most important artists in East Germany, were transferred to the Deutsches Historisches Museum; many of those paintings were on display in the Weimar exhibition. See Barbara Wolbert, “De-arranged Places: East German Art in the Museums of Unified Germany,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 57-64.

6 István Rév in Hungary, for instance, has led the charge to uncover the political motivation behind the creation of the national historical museum in Budapest, which is called the “House of Terror” and conceptually links the Third Reich and communism, supporting the approach and agendas of the conservative factions in Hungary. See István Rév, “The Terror of the House,” in *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, ed. Robin Ostow (Toronto, 2008), 47-89. For a discussion of the debates surrounding the concept of Germany's *Sonderweg*, or special path in history, see Peter Baldwin, *Reworking the Past: Hitler,*

the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate (Boston, 1990).

7 See Thomas Schaarschmidt, “Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur

Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007),” Vortrag Bernauer Strasse, December 17, 2007, p. 3.

8 The brochure of the Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur states that

the organization “aims to testify to the injustice of the SED regime and its victims, to further the anti-totalitarian consensus within our society, as well as to strengthen democracy and German unity.”

process has had consequences for historical material. Artwork supporting the former official party line, including solidarity with the Third World, women in the workplace, and industrial progress, has been destroyed or has simply disappeared. In this context, national history, museums, and material culture occupy particularly sensitive positions in Germany, an observation suggesting that more neutral exhibition sites might play an imperative role in the reconsideration of East German art.

West meets East—Los Angeles

How would cultural institutions present the GDR if such immediate sensitivities were not a factor, if the issue of nostalgia were to evaporate, if the voices of the historical actors and witnesses were to be mitigated or at least contextualized, and if geographic proximity were removed from the equation? The question is currently being raised in Los Angeles, a city that the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht once compared to the sprawling metropolis of hell, a plastic city without any cognition of the past:

... And endless
 Trains of autos,
 Lighter than their own shadows, swifter than
 Foolish thoughts, shimmering vehicles,
 In which
 Rosy people, coming from nowhere,
 Go nowhere.
 And houses, designed for happiness,
 Standing empty,
 Even when inhabited.⁹

The temporal and uprooted nature of life in Los Angeles has often provoked criticisms alluding to its status as a land without a past—a place of absent or “artificial” history. This common perception is only magnified by the myths and glamour of Hollywood and Los Angeles’s notoriety as the global center of mass media. Yet, while many have charged that Los Angeles lacks interest in historical self-reflection, it undoubtedly has a long history of being interested in all things German.

During World War II, Los Angeles became the adopted home of numerous German and Austrian exiles fleeing the Third Reich, earning itself the titles of the “Weimar of the West” and “Weimar

9 Translated by Robert Firmage. This is an excerpt from Brecht’s poem, “Contemplating Hell.” See <http://www.angelfire.com/zine/verse/brechtb.html> for the full English translation. The German original reads: [...] Und endlose Züge von Autos/ Leichter als ihr eigener Schatten, schneller als/ Törichte Gedanken, schimmernde Fahrzeuge,/ in denen,/ Rosige Leute, von nirgendher kommend,/ nirgendher fahren./ Und Häuser, für Glückliche gebaut, daher/ leerstehend/ Auch wenn bewohnt. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 830.

on the Pacific.”¹⁰ Intellectuals and artists including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Franz Werfel, and Lion Feuchtwanger converged on the city and prospered. In this sprawling metropolis, Thomas Mann wrote his masterpiece, *Doktor Faustus*, in which the protagonist Adrian Leverkühn bore an uncanny resemblance to the modernist composer, and fellow Los Angeles exile, Arnold Schoenberg. Others, such as Hanns Eisler and Fritz Lang, contributed significantly to the burgeoning film industry.¹¹ At the close of the war, several of these émigrés, including Brecht, Eisler, and the composer Paul Dessau, returned to take up new positions in the evolving communist society of the Soviet Occupation Zone, and later the GDR. Yet even after the departure of the majority of exiles from Southern California at the conclusion of World War II, their influence continued to pervade Hollywood and the broader Los Angeles cultural scene. To this day, Los Angeles boasts some of the largest collections of German art, archives, and material culture in the world, located primarily in the area’s major institutions: The Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, LACMA’s Rifkind Collection, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the University of Southern California (USC), and the Huntington Library in San Marino. Indeed, a cursory glance at some of the major exhibitions mounted in Los Angeles over the last twenty years demonstrates the region’s interest in German art:

“Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany, LACMA, Spring 1991;
Exiled to Paradise: German Intellectuals in Southern California, USC, Spring 1992;
Exiles and Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler, LACMA, Spring 1997;
Driven into Paradise; L.A.’s European Jewish Émigrés, Skirball Center, Spring 2005.

In recent years there has been a marked shift in focus in Los Angeles’s fascination with all things German; a preoccupation with exile culture has yielded to a growing interest in the postwar division of Germany.¹² This shift was embodied in the LACMA exhibition, *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Culture*, which attracted the attention of the global press. Understandably, the exhibition garnered significant attention in Germany. Several reviewers specifically emphasized the neutral space of Los Angeles as a necessary precondition for the re-evaluation of Cold War art. In a provocative article

10 See Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley, 2008).

11 *The Song of Bernadette*, based on Franz Werfel’s novel, took several Academy Awards, though not Best Picture, in 1943. Special thanks to John Ahouse for his helpful comments about the exiles in Los Angeles. John Ahouse, “Enclave in Wartime,” read at a meeting of the Los Angeles Book Collectors on September 24, 2002; subsequently read at the American Center, Moscow, on May 14, 2005.

12 This shift is mirrored in Hollywood, where World War II films such as Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) have dominated the Academy Awards. In the new century, more attention has been paid to the postwar period. Spielberg directed *Munich* about the 1972 Olympics in 2005; *Das Leben der Anderen*, a film about the secret police in East Germany, won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2007, and *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* was nominated for the same award in 2008.

in *Die Zeit*, journalist and art critic Hanno Rauterberg polemically addressed the politicization of East German art in Germany, arguing that the *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition could not have occurred in reunified Germany; it could have only taken shape in a place like Los Angeles:

A groundbreaking exhibition in Los Angeles teaches us to see and evaluate postwar German art in a new way. It buries the old images of the East and West as enemies. In Germany, no art police are on patrol, we briefly need to be reminded. There are also no state examination offices for aesthetics nor museum censors. And yet a peculiar constraint prevails: Iron Curtains traverse the German art landscape, intellectual off-limit zones wherever one looks. For even 20 years after the fall of the Wall, the Cold War has not come to an end, not in the minds of many museum directors. ... But don't celebrate too soon; liberation is approaching! And it is precisely oh-so imperialistic America that wishes to tear the German art world from its resentments. Evidently, California sunshine and a distance of 10,000 kilometers are needed to overcome the old friend-foe manner of thinking.¹³

Like Brecht, Rauterberg remarks on the sun-drenched distances between Germany and California, and yet, unlike Brecht, he argues for the museological benefits of a place where “people come from nowhere and are nowhere bound.”

LACMA's *Art of Two Germanys* curator Stephanie Barron, who has played a leading role in shaping the perspective of German art in Los Angeles, expressed a similar sentiment in a published interview with *Deutsche Welle*:

Coming at this project as someone in the United States, I don't bring the same baggage that I would if I were a curator in Germany—for better or for worse.... I think I wasn't burdened by many of the expectations that [Germans] would have coming to the exhibition.... For many in our audience...they come freshly looking at it as art—not with any preconceptions about East as one thing and West as something else. I find that very liberating and very fresh.¹⁴

13 Hanno Rauterberg, “Kunst in BRD und DDR: Nun kann die Mauer fallen,” *Die Zeit*, January 29, 2009.

14 Kate Bowen, “Top LA Curator Breaks the East-West Divide in German Art,” interview with Stephanie Barron, *Deutsche Welle*, January 30, 2009. See <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,3989952,00.html>.

In this particular case, the characterization of Los Angeles as ahistorical has allowed it to emerge as a neutral negotiator in the highly contentious debate of German history and art.

LACMA's venture was well reviewed, well received, and well attended. To mark the opening of the exhibition, cultural institutions throughout the city offered complementary programming that highlighted the need for a fresh look at East Germany. In anticipation of the exhibition, the Goethe-Institut in Los Angeles held a lecture series about East Germany. In early 2009, the Getty Research Institute hosted a symposium dedicated to exploring art and culture in the GDR while the DEFA Film Library and the Los Angeles-based Wende Museum cosponsored the film series "Wende Flicks," which brought East German filmmakers to Los Angeles to introduce the final films made by the East German film collective. The series, which was presented at a variety of institutions throughout Los Angeles, including UCLA, the Hammer Museum, LACMA, and the Goethe-Institut, broke various institutional attendance records, including overall attendance for a single event at the Goethe-Institut.

Although *Art of Two Germanys* closed on April 19, 2009, events and programs dedicated to East Germany continued at a steady pace. The October 2009 conference upon which this volume is based was one of the most prominent of these. Various GDR-themed forums at the Hammer Museum and Museum of Tolerance followed, culminating in official United States commemorative celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 2009, which Los Angeles, the sister-city of Berlin, hosted.

The Wende Museum: Los Angeles, California

Many of the East German-related events, exhibitions, and projects in Los Angeles involve the Wende Museum, a research institute devoted to archiving and providing access to the material record of Eastern Europe in the Cold War, with a focus on East Germany. Currently, I serve as the director of the museum, which was founded in 2002 and firmly established in 2004, when it moved to a new facility in Culver City. This relocation provided the physical space necessary to warehouse and catalogue the collection of over 60,000 objects and materials. In order to meet the high cataloguing demands, the Wende Museum relies heavily for its development on collaboration with and assistance from the Los Angeles eleemosynary and academic

community. It benefits directly from relationships with public history and museum studies departments, such as those located at the University of California Riverside and USC, and participation in work-study and internship programs administered by UCLA and the Getty Trust. Shelving systems were donated by the Goethe-Institut, while the museum's state-of-the-art film digitization equipment was designed in collaboration with the Academy for Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (to transfer 16mm East German



film to high-definition digital format). In addition to screening DEFA films, the museum has a center for film digitization specializing in East German health, hygiene, and educational films.

Figure 1. Photograph by Marie Astrid Gonzales of the *Collected Fragments* exhibition. Courtesy of the Wende Museum, 2011.

As emphasized in the 2009 exhibition *Collected Fragments—Traces of the GDR* illustrated here (Fig. 1), the Wende Museum's focus is on materials that are not included in other museum collections for practical and political reasons.¹⁵ This includes subjects from the rich field of East German pornography to restaurant menus, collections that are both currently being used by cultural scholars and historians in their research.¹⁶ Other materials have been donated to the museum by former historical participants who believe that their personal collections would be politicized by European institutions. This is especially the case with perpetrators, many of whom worked for the notorious police services such as the Stasi. Recently, John Ahouse, special collections curator at the Wende Museum, has begun cataloguing a collection donated by former East German border guards who never considered contributing their materials to a German institution for fear of political backlash. Similarly, Erich Honecker's confidant Hans Wauer gave the museum Honecker's personal papers from his time in the Moabit prison in the early 1990s; Wauer had threatened to destroy the papers fearing that a European institution would politicize them. Thus, as with the *Art*

15 *Collected Fragments—Traces of the GDR*, exhibition, Wende Museum, co-curated by Justinian Jampol and Joes Segal, December 2009.

16 Josie McLellan (University of Bristol) has worked on erotica in the GDR (see her contribution in this volume), and Paul Freedman (Yale University) is conducting research for a project concerning luxury foods in the GDR.

of *Two Germanys* exhibition, the political and geographic distance of the Wende Museum has benefits, in this case allowing the museum to preserve materials that might otherwise have been destroyed.¹⁷

In many respects, the museum can be regarded as a direct manifestation of the difficulties surrounding the legacy of the GDR since the *Wende*. If the items in its collections were deemed of historical or aesthetic value, they would be housed in appropriate institutions, and the museum would not exist. The collections are, in effect, made up of materials that have been relegated to the dustbin of history, both before and after the *Wende*. Included in the collections are, for example, plush velvet banners from the 1950s with large gaping holes where Stalin's profile was removed in the 1960s. After 1989, as Silke Wagler, head of Kunstfonds Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, has commented, a large part of the art and other cultural materials produced in the GDR was either consigned to *Kunstdepots* or deaccessioned altogether. Works of art ended up in attics, basements, antique shops, flea markets, and small historical auction houses, where East German paintings were sold alongside Nazi paraphernalia and Prussian uniforms. It is these discarded items that form the basis of the Wende Museum's collections. In a post-*Wende* climate, these items are divorced from their original meanings; curators are now faced with the challenge of exploring how such items should be interpreted and of determining what they mean.

Many of these issues of historical relevance and meaning come together in Heinz Drache's 1952 painting *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau* (The People say 'Yes' to Peaceful Building), which was loaned by the Wende Museum to LACMA for inclusion in the *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition (Fig. 2). A commission for the *Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Third German Art Exhibition) in Dresden in 1953, Drache's oil-on-canvas painting depicts workers building the grand East Berlin boulevard of Stalinallee, a popular theme in the political art of the early 1950s. The painting initially won acclaim and received widespread press attention. Its fame was short-lived, however; in the wake of June 17, 1953, Drache's artistic homage to the same "heroic" workers who had initiated the uprising offered an uncomfortable and conflicted message. The painting was consigned to a dark basement in East Berlin for the next four decades where it was joined by other works by Drache in the early 1990s, when paintings

17 Arnold Bartetzky, "Lenins Asyl unter Kaliforniens Himmel," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 11, 2009.

were removed from galleries, offices, exhibitions, and archives of the eastern *Länder* of the newly unified Germany. The Wende Museum acquired several of these paintings in 2007.

Along with the many conceptual and practical benefits resulting from Los Angeles's outsider status come some specific drawbacks, most of which pertain to the city's disengagement. The United States was a major actor in the drama of the Cold War, and Los Angeles is very much a product of the military-industrial complex that boomed in the postwar era. Weapons factories rose from the semi-arid landscape just as quickly as suburbia began to dominate the geographic and cultural scenery of Southern California. The supposed target of these military weapons was the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites, the latter being viewed simply as hapless victims of the red empire. Such rhetoric enabled Americans to interpret the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the liberation of West-loving Eastern Europeans from the grips of Soviet domination.

But over the last twenty years, as fear of nuclear war and the politics of the Cold War have steadily eroded and been replaced with new fears of terrorism and global economic and environmental decline, audiences to the exhibits have often lost a historical and educational context for the art they are viewing. This absence of political and historical awareness is problematic for curators. While the political component of East German art and material culture should not dominate or dictate interpretation, it played an undeniable role in the realms of production, dissemination, censorship, and reception. In fact, it is the rich and complex mixture of politics, culture, history, and art that makes the products of East Germany particularly dynamic, and, more importantly, renders them useful sources of information about society, artistic expression, and everyday life.



Figure 2. Heinz Drache, *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau, 1952*. In the collection of the Wende Museum, 2011.

Conclusion

The prioritization of aesthetic quality over cultural or historical significance raises a strong, and perhaps political, point that has important consequences. It allows for East German art to be displayed and appreciated as art rather than as evidence of dictatorship, as is often the case in Germany. The recognition of East German art as art (even when this recognition comes at the expense of political and cultural awareness) provides a rationale for its preservation and exhibition; Western civilization displays art; it does not destroy it. The tendency to evaluate GDR art purely in terms of its merit as historical documentation has led to a practice of non-conservation and a reluctance to spend state resources preserving overwhelming amounts of material. This reluctance has been compounded by the dominance of an interpretive lens of totalitarianism, through which “communist art” is perceived as a monolithic expression of an omnipotent regime. In this context, ten paintings make the same point as a thousand, withering the need to collect and preserve. Here I argue that GDR art deserves to be strategically collected in an ongoing process, involving a long-term and more nuanced approach that both recognizes the plurality of GDR art and promotes a differentiated and evolving understanding of East German artistry. Such a position is not without controversy: in 2005, Dr. Rainer Eckert, director of the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig and a genuine victim of the GDR regime, responded to my arguments with the retort that everything that needed to be collected already had been.¹⁸

18 As Eckert argued, “I can’t really say I understand the point of what [Jampol] is doing Almost everything is already documented in Germany And actually it bothers me that someone in California is making such claims.” Jody K. Biehl, “East Germany Goes Hollywood: A Cold War Museum in Sunny Climes,” *Der Spiegel International*, April 22, 2005.

19 See Martin Sabrow, Rainer Eckert, Monika Flacke, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Freya Klier, Roland Jahn, Tina Krone, Peter Maser, Ulrike Poppe, and Hermann Rudolph, eds., *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Göttingen, 2007).

Those who subscribe to the totalitarian model and assert the immorality of East German art certainly have a trump card in the Stasi. The Stasi, which had real and harmful implications for the well-being of East German citizens, has become synonymous with the repression characteristic of the East German state apparatus and its systematic control over the people, culture, and art. From this perspective, East German material culture and art, like Nazi art, are simply remnants of a terrible regime that museums should resist exhibiting—or even ceremoniously destroy. In this model, such actions serve to avenge the grotesque way in which culture was manipulated during periods of totalitarian rule. Although the validity of the model has come under question in recent years, its moral imperative continues to dominate state policy in Germany. The report of the Sabrow Commission, for example, determined that too great an emphasis was being placed on the Stasi in the exhibitions and collections of state-funded cultural institutions.¹⁹ (Excluded from this were investigations of everyday

life and the varied relationship between culture and politics.) Despite such recommendations, however, the report, which was submitted to the Bundestagsausschuss für Kultur und Medien in 2007, was ultimately altered by the government minister for culture in order to re-emphasize the centrality of the Stasi and draw parallels between the GDR and the Third Reich.²⁰

Because the conflict between East German perpetrators and their victims is absent from the political landscape of Los Angeles, there is not the same pressure to interject the moral messages that would normally predetermine or at least heavily influence German approaches to the art or materials on display. With this moral priority removed, the use of material culture and art can be expanded to offer insight into products, lifestyles, aspirations, and activities that shaped everyday life in the GDR. In other words, materials that would otherwise remain hidden or presented within the context of a strict totalitarian narrative are free to be used as evidence to reach unscripted conclusions. The display of *Auftragskunst*, or officially commissioned art, in Southern California does not spark protests such as those that occurred at the Neue Nationalgalerie in 1994, when curators sought to exhibit paintings of the Leipzig School.²¹ Moreover, exploration of political iconography within the realm of everyday life does not immediately lead to charges of indulging in naïve nostalgia for the former German state. In sum, by allowing the viewer to come into contact with perspectives on the GDR that venture beyond the undeniable brutality of the Stasi, visitors can engage with moral questions in a multifaceted, and ultimately meaningful way.

Los Angeles institutions, including the Wende Museum, cannot resolve the problems of East German history. And yet, they continue to play an important role in the debates surrounding the reception of East German art and culture. As German history has become internationalized, Los Angeles has emerged as an important “alternative voice” in debates about what East Germany *means*. German newspaper articles that address the latest controversy over how the past is represented increasingly include outside perspectives, in particular those from Los Angeles. In this case, Los Angeles is in a unique position. While it remains far away from the frontlines of the historical struggle, it simultaneously belongs to German historiography, both through the early waves of German exiles and the more recent run of contemporary exhibitions, projects, and programs. The juxtaposition of Berlin and Los Angeles and their contrasting approaches to and

20 Schaarschmidt, “Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007),” p. 3.

21 See Joes Segal, “Disturbing Things: The Interpretation of East German Artwork in Re-unified Germany” in this volume.

arguments about GDR art helps to define and illuminate the constantly changing contours of the perceptions and legacy of East Germany.

As a final postscript, we may consider the following recent exchange between the two cities. When the repackaged version of LACMA's *Art of Two Germanys* exhibition came to Berlin in October 2009, it was housed in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, which perhaps controls more East German art than any other institution. The shift in where and how the exhibition was presented—notably, in a *history* museum rather than an art gallery and with the East German artworks reprioritized as historical objects—is suggestive of the differing priorities and approaches of the two cities. These differences were the theme of a recent roundtable in Berlin hosted by Peter Tokofsky of the Getty Trust and organized by the Los Angeles-based Zócalo, a forum for civic discourse directed by *Los Angeles Times* journalist Gregory Rodriguez.²² The event, which was entitled “Los Angeles vs. Berlin: How Should New Cities Deal with Their Pasts?,” explored, for the most part, the contrasts between the two cities. Yet a common thread was clear. Despite their differences, Berlin and Los Angeles have contributed significantly, both directly and indirectly, to a transcontinental relationship that dates from World War II, and the two remain influential and often critical observers of one another today. Ultimately, it is a relationship that is both informative and constructive and one that has significant potential for dealing with the complex legacies of the GDR.

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22 See <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/thepublicsquare/2009/07/last-night-los-angeles-vs-berlin>.