

Press Release

Thomas Steinert

War das ein Leben – behind the Iron Curtain

7 May – 20 June 2009

Open Tuesday – Saturday 10am-6pm

Private View: 6 May, 6pm – 8pm

Mummery + Schnelle are pleased to present the first exhibition of Thomas Steinert's artwork outside of Germany. It will feature work from two loosely defined series of photographs depicting both public and private life in East Germany during the time of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Born in Burgstädt in East Germany in 1949 Steinert has lived most of his life in Leipzig, studying at the Academy of Visual Arts there between 1972 and 1977. After graduating he joined the official Verband Bildender Künstler (Association of Fine Artists), but he remained something of an outsider and was given little in the way of paid commissions, working instead on projects of his own invention, principally the documentation of features of the urban environment, such as graves and bathhouses, that were slowly disappearing as a result of 'progressive' town planning in the 1970s.

At the same time he was also photographing the life going on around him in the Connewitz suburb of Leipzig – in the streets, in bars, factories, studios and parks. Steinert states that these latter works were not a conscious effort to chronicle this life in a documentary manner, indeed he claims to have failed as a chronicler. All that he was doing was getting through life the only way that, as an artist, he knew how – by making art. The Connewitz photographs are highly idiosyncratic and do not conform to the usual theoretical conventions of documentary photography. They are a record of the last twenty years of the GDR, a time when people were coming to the realization that the government-indoctrinated ideologies were failing. Steinert's photographs reveal the signs of the state's decline in images of everyday life, capturing moments of retreat and providing glimpses into private worlds that offered respite from the crumbling world outside. Also included in the exhibition are Steinert's photographs of the more public side of life, the carefully choreographed state-organised propaganda parades celebrating the GDR's promotion of the latest agricultural machinery and telecommunications technologies – a world away from daily life in Connewitz.

With their candour and honesty Steinert's works capture, according to Gerhard Mack writing in the German magazine *Art*, a true feeling of what life was like during the last two decades of the GDR. This is in part perhaps because of Steinert's position on the periphery and his lack of ambition for these particular works.

Thomas Steinert never exhibited his work at any of the semi-official or underground galleries in the East during the time of the GDR and was not associated with any of photographers there who did exhibit and received some recognition. He remained largely unknown and it is only since 1989 that his work has begun to be shown, most notably at the Kunstverein Leipzig in 2001.

For enquiries, please contact Andrew Mummery at: andrew@mummerschnelle.com or
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Next exhibition at Mummery + Schnelle: Peter Harris, 25 June – 1 August 2009