

Summary Documentation of 200 Art in Architecture Projects Commissioned by the Federal Republic of Germany from 1950 to 1979

Summary in English

The research project “Public art of federal buildings from 1950 to 1979” introduces 200 art in architecture projects in brief descriptions. The selection showcases works of all genres commissioned from 1950 to 1979 for federal buildings in the divided Federal Republic of Germany. The study is a project of Germany’s Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung or BBR – the federal office for construction and public spaces administration, and it is aimed at setting up a publicly accessible, online database of the eight to ten thousand works of art commissioned by the federal administration for government and military buildings within sixty years. Form and function of the works is analyzed within the architectural context, as well as purpose and use of the respective agencies. Information on the artists’ oeuvre and cultural background contribute to the understanding of the art. Individual texts were written as comprehensive descriptions intended to be accessible online as searchable individual pages.

Germany’s Bundestag – the House of Representatives – adopted the federal public art ordinance in 1950. The Bundesbaudirektion – the federal building authority – formed in the same year, oversaw federal construction that included public art of all top-level bureaus and agencies, as well as federal buildings in Berlin, Bonn and abroad. The building authorities of the individual states supervise state-level federal buildings. The German Red Cross, German schools abroad and foundations, as for example the Max-Planck-Institute and the DAAD, are included within this purview. The ordinance was in effect for the federal railroad and postal service buildings until they were privatized in 1994. From 1977 to 1984 the Ergänzungsfond, a supplemental fund, supported additional public art commissions for federal capital improvement projects. The works commissioned by the federal building authority represent an important facet of Germany’s cultural heritage. Germany’s federal art in architecture reflects the country’s aesthetic, social and political trends. The works connect citizens and visitors from abroad with art and artistic processes.

RESEARCH

The federal building administration, some of the state administrations, as well as the federal railroad and postal service bureau have published a few limited compendiums of federal buildings and their public art. Architecture journals are an important source of information, with the journal *Die Bauverwaltung: Zeitschrift für behördliches Bauwesen* as key publication, along with art catalogues and catalogues raisonnés. Information on federally commissioned art can principally be found within the construction documentation. Over the years construction records were destroyed or partially transferred to archives. Only a very limited number of files from the early years have been preserved.

Structural changes within the federal administration, demolition, expansion and new construction made the research difficult at times. Important information was obtained on site or by contacting the current users of properties. Further, the artists’ own records, or their estates, offer rich sources of information; particularly the personal archives of regional artists or those working outside academia offer substantial materials for further research. Some works by regional artists are described for the first time.

RESULTS

Art

Art in architecture of the early years emphasized the artisan traditions along with expert craftsmanship. Murals, works in glass and mosaics, as well as works in fiber for interior walls were typical early federal commissions. Reliefs, stone or bronze sculptures and fountains in courtyards

or on plazas enlivened the architecture. Architectural glass, flooring and paving, railings and wall coverings were installed in buildings. The commissioning parties used art as a means of representation and to demonstrate importance through material value. Knotted or woven, handmade wall hangings or elaborate wall and floor mosaics demonstrated both high aesthetic and material value. High-end materials including basalt and other stones as well as bronze for sculptures; marble mosaics or gold inlays served to emphasize the prestige and importance of government. This is apparent especially in the modern steel frame architecture. Artists designed columns with reliefs, Roman style mosaics or reliefs in copper. The form and material quality of the art set the tone within the buildings.

While the number of murals declined beginning in the 1960s, reliefs and wall-mounted sculptures in an abundance of new materials increased, both in interior and exterior applications, e.g. in concrete, Plexiglas or polystyrene. Individual artistic innovation in enameling technique, surface-treated stainless steel, or cast aluminum resulted in highly original, large-scale abstract reliefs at the Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt Braunschweig. Beginning in the 1960s, paralleling the developments in architecture, stainless and Corten steel, as well as aluminum – also in combination with other materials – became the new favorite materials for exterior sculptures. With the execution of new abstract window designs, architectural glass underwent a transformation, as well. Peter Brüning, an artist influenced by graphic design, likely completed the world's first highway monument in 1968 along the Bundesautobahn I in Wuppertal. The first kinetic and Optical Art projects were commissioned for federal buildings.

The early, federally commissioned art in architecture sought to avoid ideological imagery and content. The building administration found new, uncontroversial narratives for murals and sculptures. Next to the phoenix rising from the ashes as a preferred symbol of reconstruction and new beginnings, animal imagery was generally favored. Sculptural representations of the human figure mostly featured figurative abstraction, often with allegorical functions. In the late 1960s and 1970s non-figurative abstraction began to dominate public art at federal buildings. The few animal representations are examples of figurative abstraction or caricatures. Surprisingly common in civic administration buildings of the fifties are murals showing abstracted figurative still lifes or idylls of Mediterranean landscapes, often found in cafeterias. Idealized sceneries of abundance and harmony in soft pastel hues reflected the employees' desire to escape the dismal reality of ruins and sacrifice, at least during lunch. Cityscapes and industrial landscapes depicted in large-scale murals were an important topic of that period. Shown were clearly identifiable motifs, such as river scenes, factory silhouettes and church towers, complemented by symbols of specific industries and other local characteristics.

The Federal building authority did not pursue a specific style for prominent, national and international federal buildings. Initially, the construction administration offices commissioned primarily figurative works. Characteristic of these sculptures and murals was a naturalistic and cautiously abstract style. More abstract works were inspired by the artists of the École de Paris, especially Matisse, Braque und Picasso. Non-figurative abstract art, introduced by the contemporary Avant-garde of Abstract Expressionism or Germany's Informel approach, was uncommon until the mid-sixties. In line with the development of new modes of representation, murals were created in a variety of styles. They were characterized by the Informel direction in painting and appeared as geometric abstraction in Formica designs or, in some cases, in a surrealist manner. The collaboration of art and architecture became an important topic in the early seventies. The early teamwork of architects and artists led to concepts that were seamlessly implemented throughout the buildings as comprehensive, geometric-abstract color field compositions and organic-abstract reliefs, executed in concrete. The most expansive integrative works are found in the work of Otto Herbert Hajek, whose abundant installations of geometric color markings, the *Farbzeichen* in bright primary colors, animate interior walls, façades and plazas.

At world fairs, the Federal missions abroad and with some other modern architecture and art projects, Germany presented itself primarily with the most established German sculptors of the non-figurative abstraction, such as Bernhard Heiliger, Fritz Koenig und Karl Hartung. They were joined by some lesser known but surprisingly cutting-edge artists like Hans Kindermann and Paul Corazolla. Starting in the seventies graphic artists, among them Siegfried Kischko, received commissions. Leading artists of the sixties and seventies included Erich Hauser, Ansgar Nierhoff und Norbert Kricke.

Women artists were grossly underrepresented during the first three decades following World War II. E.R. Nele and Edith Müller-Ortloff created non-representational artworks for the more representative buildings. Represented above average were fiber artists including Edith Müller-Ortloff, Gabriele Grosse and Sigrid Wylach.

Institutions

The first important buildings of the Federal Republic of Germany were government buildings in the temporary federal capital in Bonn, such as the official residences of the president and the chancellor in the Villa Hammerschmidt and Palais Schaumburg. Among the first new construction measures were the Bundeshaus, seat of the Bundestag (Lower House of the German Parliament), the Bundesrat (Upper House of the German Parliament) and the Ministries. Many lesser-known artists furnished them with sculptures, rugs, paintings and national emblems. Beginning in the mid-sixties the building administration expanded the Kanzleramt and the Ministries and fitted the new structures with art. Along with other artists the three most important abstract artists received commissions: Otto Herbert Hajek, Bernhard Heiliger and Ansgar Nierhoff. Their monumental works matched the Bauhaus-inspired architecture of the International Style. As a result of these building modifications many artworks of the 1950s were lost. The reunification heralded a complete governmental restructuring process, followed by an extensive building transfer and the disappearance of some art at Bonn's federal properties.

Due to the special status of Berlin and the decentralized structure of the Federal Republic, the federal administration situated its agencies and institutions in all federal states. Among the early, large-scale building campaigns were the expansion of the Bundesgerichtshof in Karlsruhe, the Bundesrechnungshof in Frankfurt and the Deutsches Patentamt in Munich. Over the decades, some agencies were repeatedly expanded and outfitted with public art, i.e. the Deutsches Patent- und Markenamt in Munich and the Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt in Braunschweig. Today these institutions administer their own art collections. While some institutions had a great interest in public art, other federal agencies only placed a few major objects and decorative works in cafeterias and entrance lobbies. Only few artworks established a direct narrative connection to the institution. In the sixties and seventies non-figurative abstract works were commissioned from nationally renowned as well as regionally active artists. Public art of those decades features applications of new materials and working methods.

Among Germany's most spectacular cultural buildings are the German Pavilions of the 1958 and 1964 World Fairs. In addition to presenting exceptional modern architecture, the country also showcased non-figurative abstract art by the most prominent German sculptors: Karl Hartung, Bernhard Heiliger, Fritz Koenig, Norbert Kricke and Erich Reuter. Thus, the new beginning after the World War, anchored in the artistic practice and theories of the Bauhaus, was expressed at the highest international level.

Sculptor Bernhard Heiliger's work is positioned uniquely because he created works for some of Germany's most important, representative cultural edifices, among them the federally funded foundations, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Stiftung Germanisches Nationalmuseum. For many years, these two institutions administered the only federal cultural collections attributable to the cultural hegemony of the federal states.

Art in architecture was commissioned for training centers in Bonn and Sigmaringen, where federal employees were prepared for assignments in Germany and abroad. First efforts of an integrated approach to art and architecture were launched here.

A number of highway rest stops were constructed in the sixties and seventies and introduced self-serve amenities that became commonplace after 1962. These structures became venues for wall-mounted works by regionally active artists.

The federal administration financed many cultural and educational institutions through special allocations for capital construction and public art during the fifties, notably the Deutscher Akademischer Auslandsdienst (DAAD) or the Präsidium des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes in Bonn. Both organizations commissioned very specific art that characterizes their missions. Many of Germany's public schools abroad, established and administered by non-profit organizations, received capital construction funding. New schools were built and installed works by German artists in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, the United States and elsewhere. In addition to art with subject matters specific to these institutions, a number of aesthetically advanced works were created.

Among the federal building assignments were replacement buildings for both the allied forces and the Bundeswehr, which was established in 1955. The federal army or Bundeswehr initiated the construction of barracks, a leadership academy and training centers. New hospitals and Germany's two military academies were built later, in the sixties and seventies. The building authority and the Bundeswehr administration commissioned art for all buildings. Preferred were non-heroic sculptures and murals, including early, non-figurative abstract murals by Max Ackermann and Ulrich-Olaf Deimel. Popular during the sixties and seventies were wall installations fully integrated into the building architecture, which at times had a functional purpose. High-caliber sculptures by leading artists of the seventies are located on the grounds of the educational Bundeswehr institutions, among them Ansgar Nierhoff and Erich Reusch. The works often represent technical or mathematical themes.

Customs buildings are among the federal buildings with the greatest continuity. Despite the closure of many offices following the 1985 Schengen Agreement (termination of border controls at the internal borders of the EU), the buildings today are often used by Customs for other tasks. Most customs and tax administration buildings were constructed in the early fifties. While the architecture of customs buildings can rarely be considered innovative, the buildings benefit from the art projects, which were commissioned especially for the main customs agency offices. Unlike the art at other agencies, the works are usually still in place and very well maintained. Noteworthy are the regional differences in style, though this study can serve only as the beginning of a more thorough assessment. Germany's South boasts mostly figurative works of art. In North Rhine-Westphalia's customs buildings artists Georg Meistermann and Hans Kaiser created non-figurative abstractions in the fifties already. The main customs and financial building in Saarbrücken houses typical, 1970s abstract works.

Employment agencies (today the Agentur für Arbeit) lack continuity, particularly the early buildings and their documentation. Many post-war buildings were reconstructed, sold or torn down. The industrial restructuring of many areas, like the Ruhr region at the end of the sixties, led to increased unemployment and the construction of new employment offices. The art in architecture there can be compared to works in customs buildings, with place-specific employment office themes. Murals and reliefs were typical genres employed. Depictions of professional emblems evolved from a combination of medieval trade symbols and schematic standardizations that emerged during the period of social and nationalistic realism in the thirties. Typical for the late sixties and seventies are abstract wall and window treatments by regional artists.

After World War II the regional postal construction administrations rebuilt many existing post offices and expanded them. Newly constructed in the early 1950s were larger postal service, post bank and telecommunications offices. These major buildings and towers were erected as modern steel frame structures at prime city center locations. The postal service construction offices emphasized the placement of art in buildings. Postal buildings feature a diverse range of public art in narrative, and even as monumental works. These latter range from large-scale sculptures by Willy Meller and abstract bronzes by Bernhard Heiliger to Otto Herbert Hajek's relief friezes. Noteworthy are imposing works at the larger structures of the postal savings banks – the Postscheckämter – in Hamburg, Dortmund and Nuremberg, whose lavishly executed public art is comparable to that found in private banks. Fountains were popular in the seventies. Growing or newly founded communities necessitated the construction of a series of small postal service stations in the sixties and seventies that included artworks by regional artists. Following the postal structure law of 1990 and privatization of the federal postal service, many postal buildings were unloaded during the consolidation of the new corporate group. Consequently, many artworks were lost during ownership transfers and demolitions.

Train stations were part of the reconstruction following World War II. Besides traditional architecture a series of progressive new structures was built that featured modern glass facades, neon lighting and bold flying roofs. Artists contributed large-scale murals as focal points in the large concourse halls. Most of the murals show, to a greater or lesser degree of abstraction, topographic details or typical views, professions and products. The art welcomed users to the local destination. Due to an increase in commercial advertising only a small number of works remain.

Since some works created 1950-1979 were lost due to restructuring processes, expansion, reconstruction, new construction or demolition of various institutions, partially without documentation, the question arises how losses can be limited in the future. After the reconstruction of the post-war years, artworks disappeared during the building boom of the sixties and seventies. The preservation of art became an issue once again during the large-scale structural changes following Germany's reunification. Affected were particularly the works sited at large federal agencies, authorities and research institutions, as well as after 2010 art in architecture that belonged to the Bundeswehr. The newly established Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben has been overseeing the leasing or sale of all vacant federal real estate since 2005. The establishment of a comprehensive catalog of the existing public art is recommended, so that these cultural assets can be preserved during the transition to new uses or the sale of properties. The Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung initiated this endeavor through the studies carried out in recent years.