

Hambleton and The White Liners: Two examples of Conceptual Street Art on the Berlin Wall

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Abstract

A rarely discussed conceptual yet political work of illegal street art by Richard Hambleton on the Berlin Wall initiated the by far most famous street art spot on The Wall later made popular by the likes of Terry Noir, Keith Haring or Ron English—and (on Haring's mural) the so-called White Liners who tried to make The Wall visible again—under all these beautiful colorful co/selfmarketing paintings. They planned to cross out (with a white line) ALL paintings on the 170 kilometers of The Wall. This essay gives an overview about the terms, wall generations, first (known) artists dealing with (and on) The Wall and tries to answer if painting something terrible changes it for the better or the worse.

Which Wall are we talking about?

Already during the process of building the Berlin Wall in August 1961 it got different names on both sides of the wall. The west called it polemically „rotes KZ“¹ [red concentration camp], referring to the communists that built it, or „Ulbricht KZ“² [Ulbricht concentration camp] named after the GDR leader of that time. Willy Brandt, then-Major of Berlin, called it the „Schandmauer“³ [„wall of shame“]. The GDR avoided to call the wall a wall, the term „Mauer“ (i.e. wall) did not appear in official GDR papers before 25 years after it was built.⁴ They usually called it „antifaschistischer Schutzwall“⁵ (i.e. Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart), as if the wall would protect GDR citizens from the fascist and capitalist west. All those terms were propaganda terms, since the fate of concentration camp

prisoners were a much harder one than the ones of people in West Berlin and the GDR tried mostly to stop their own citizens to leave the GDR, not to protect them from the West.

The Berlin wall seemed, however, to have turned West Berlin after a while formally into a huge open air prison. „The long shot makes it clear that the part referred to as „The Wall“ was only the architectural edge strip of an ensemble that formed the „border security system“, a moat with a second wall („Hinterland Wall“), minefields and concrete slabs, to complement its military topography. Shelters, observation bunkers and towers, tripwires and barrier fences, border marker posts and dog leashes, slivers of sand and Spanish riders, light poles and self-firing installations belonged.“⁶ Traditionally, as Michael Diers

1 - Der Kurier (West-Berlin), August 14, 1961. Quoted after Der Kurier (West-Berlin), August 14, 1961. Quoted after Hans Georg Lehmann: Mit der Mauer leben? Die Einstellung zur Berliner Mauer im Wandel. 16.08.1986, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/533853/mit-der-mauer-leben-die-einstellung-zur-berliner-mauer-im-wandel/>

2 - Margot Hutzler-Spichtinger/Klaus Schönberger: »Unüberhörbare Wortmeldungen der Bürger ... « DDR-Gesellschaft im Vorabend des Umbruchs - Jena 1988/89. Leipzig 1994, p. 18.

3 - Hans Georg Lehmann: Mit der Mauer leben? Die Einstellung zur Berliner Mauer im Wandel. 16.08.1986, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/533853/mit-der-mauer-leben-die-einstellung-zur-berliner-mauer-im-wandel/>

4 - Die „Mauer“ erscheint im Neuen Deutschland, TAZ, 08.05.1987, Nr. 2202, p. 6.

5 - Werner Harenberg: »Wir sind keine Helden gewesen« [Interview with Horst Sindermann], Der Spiegel, May 6, 1990, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/wir-sind-keine-helden-gewesen-a-dd64ac1b-0002-0001-0000-000013498194>

6 - Michael Diers: Die Mauer. Notizen zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte eines deutschen Symbol(l) Werks. In: kritische berichte 3/1992, p. 60 [translation by Ulrich Blanché].

wrote, an inside and outside of the wall, an intra or extra muros (for a fortress: counterscarpe and escarpe) can be distinguished at first glance. This does apply here according to the usual scheme, so that, looking at the overall course of the Wall, one might assume that rather the western part of Berlin has sealed itself off from the surrounding area and the neighboring town, as it was in the case in the 13th century with the the two neighboring cities of Cölln and Berlin, before they were later united by a common ring of walls.⁷ Like the terms „Red Concentration Camp“ or „Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart“ also implied, people on both sides of the Berlin wall claimed to be free and the others the ones that are in prison.

The image of the Berlin Wall today, 25 years after it has been torn down, and thus also the spectators gaze on it - usually comes from the winners side, the west, i.e. from the side on which the majority of it was painted. It was illegal to paint on both sides of the wall, as also the west side was 5 meters on GDR territory. The Berlin wall was 155 km kilometers long, the one between East and West Berlin 43.1 km. Four generations or three different phases of walls existed between 1961 and 1989/90. All were illegally painted or became part of artworks otherwise, but only the last Wall generation was perfect for being painted.

Beuys and Matta Clark - Does a more aesthetic appearance change The Wall for the better or the worse?

Before artists actually painted on the wall, they talked about the wall. One of the first prominent examples was Joseph Beuys. When he recommended at the Festival of New Art in Aachen, a Fluxus event on July 20, 1964, just three years after the Wall was built, to raise the Berlin Wall by five centimeters - for reasons of good proportion,⁸

Beuys was still talking about the first generation of the wall still built with concrete elements and hollow blocks.

I link Beuys' quote to a dialogue street artist Banksy mentioned when he painted another political wall, the segregation boarder between Israel and Palestinians.

“Old man: You paint the wall, you make it look beautiful.

Banksy: Thanks

Old man: We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall, go home.”⁹

A “beautiful” or well proportioned wall would maybe become less offensive and so it might stay longer. For this man Banksy created art in an exclusively decorative sense of the word. The old man did not realize Banksy wanted to call international attention to the barrier via his art on the internet. The old man added “go home”. He showed Banksy, the Western European activist, who wanted to do good, in his opinion at least, that he might do the opposite. Does a more aesthetic appearance of a prison wall change it for the better or the worse? Beuys' ironical, provocative approach went in a similar way. Of course it sounds completely unrealistic that GDR leaders would order to build the wall more according to good proportions. Good proportions would also be highly subjective in the case of the Berlin wall, to prevent escapes was their main goal. However, the GDR *did* actually also change the wall for aesthetic reasons. It was the “modern border,” “centrally conceived and systematically planned” from 1965 onward, that led to a comprehensive renewal and transformation of the Berlin Wall. After it became apparent that the Wall would become a permanent condition, the (GDR leading political party) SED leadership pushed ahead with the expansion and armament of the “state border”: on the

7 - Michael Diers: Die Mauer. Notizen zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte eines deutschen Symbol(l) Werks. In: kritische berichte 3/1992, p. 61 [translation by Ulrich Blanché].

8 - Das Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen verlangte 1964 eine Erklärung des damaligen Professors der Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie. From: Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, Karin Thomas: “Joseph Beuys”. Köln 1994. Übersichtsseite zum 10. Jahrestag des Mauerfalls. In: Tagesspiegel, 08.11.1999. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/das-innenministerium-des-landes-nordrhein-westfalen-verlangte-1964-eine-erklarung-des-damaligen-professors-der-duesseldorfer-kunstakademie/103072.html>

9 - Banksy.co.uk on August 5th 2005. <http://web.archive.org/web/20050808012525/http://www.banksy.co.uk/news/palestine4.html> (seen April 2013).

one hand, it was to become increasingly impassable, but its appearance should be “cultured”¹⁰ on the other, since “the pioneering technical installations [...] often did not contribute to strengthening the reputation of the GDR in the eyes of the world.”¹¹ The obviously barbaric elements - such as the historically very negatively connoted barbed wire - increasingly disappeared from the public’s field of vision in the West from the mid-1960s onward with the second expansion stage of The Wall.¹²

Beuys got into trouble for his slogan, which could have been a graffiti on The Wall. In August 1964, the Ministry of the Interior of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia demanded an explanation from Beuys, as professor at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. He answered:

“I begin quite real - banal (understatement method!): The consideration of the Berlin wall, from a point of view, which considers alone the proportion of this building, should be still allowed. Defuses immediately the wall. By inner laughter. Destroys the wall. One is no longer stuck to the physical wall. It is directed to the spiritual wall, and to overcome this, that is what matters. First, therefore, the wall is overcome by me. Motto: Under my heart government the wall would not have originated at all.

Spontaneously arising question: “Which element in me or other people has let this thing come into existence?”

Quintessence: the wall as such is completely unimportant. Don’t talk so much about the wall! Establish a better

morality in the human race by self-education, and all walls disappear. After all, there are so many walls between you and me.

A wall in itself is very beautiful, if the proportion is right.

When I come to Berlin, people tug at me after five minutes at the latest. “Have you been to the Wall?” Yes, I know the Wall from inner experience. I know exactly what it is, this wall. Furthermore, I declare myself ready to solve this wall problem in my lifetime. If I am given the opportunity to do so.”¹³

Beuys was talking about this first generation of The Wall, not the ones we usually know from photos, postcards and video news coverage, which is often the third one, the GDR built from 1975 onwards. US artist and street art pioneer Gordon Matta Clark seemed to be the first (known) foreign artist to paint on the Berlin wall already in 1976.¹⁴ He asked in a provocative way in 1976 when he saw The Wall: „O, that’s Bauhaus?”¹⁵ These short, graffiti-like artist quotes about The Wall by Beuys and Matta-Clark correspond to anonymous word graffiti on The Berlin Wall in the 1960s and 70s, which was mostly political slogan graffiti, no images. The boundary wall of the previous expansion phase consisted of horizontal concrete slabs stacked between double-T beams, whose noticeably rougher and uneven surface had been used primarily as a support for (political) graffiti and slogans only. For large-scale, coherent mural painting, the wall of the first and second stages of

10 - The Minister of National Defence, Heinz Hoffmann, during the inspection of a test section of the border fortifications of the second expansion phase at the border troop training area in Streganz in 1965: ‘The wall and border fence are very cultured [„kulturvoll“]: Unofficial protocol of the Chief of Pioneering of the City Commandant’s Office Berlin on the inspection of the model border section in Streganz by the Minister for National Defence on 29.1.1965, BA-MA VA-07/9061. Quoted after Kuhrmann 2011, p. 26.

11 - Submission No. 14/65 for the management of the Ministry of National Defence: Decision on the prospective expansion of a border security strip along the state border in the area of the NVA border troops, Berlin (1966-1970). Submitted by the city commander of the capital of the GDR. Quoted after Kuhrmann 2011, p. 26.

12 - Kuhrmann 2011, p. 26.

13 - Das Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen verlangte 1964 eine Erklärung des damaligen Professors der Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie. From: Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, Karin Thomas: “Joseph Beuys”. Köln 1994. Übersichtsseite zum 10. Jahrestag des Mauerfalls. In: Tagesspiegel, 08.11.1999. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/das-innenministerium-des-landes-nordrhein-westfalen-verlangte-1964-eine-erklarung-des-damaligen-professors-der-duesseldorfer-kunstakademie/103072.html>

14 - Gordon Matta-Clark, *The Wall*, 1976-2007, 15:04 min, color, sound, 16 mm film and video, <https://www.eai.org/titles/the-wall>; see also Corinne Diserens, Thomas E. Crow, Judith Russi Kirshner: Gordon Matta-Clark. London 2010, p. 102.

expansion was a poor substrate.¹⁶ So artists took photos of, or did works close to the wall like Shinkichi Tajiri and Allan Kaprow around 1970, before trained and known artists actually painted on the wall, not much before the 1980s. US artist Jonathan Borofsky was then one of the first prominent artists to paint the whole height of the Berlin wall, his Running Man appeared as late as 1982. But even when known Canadian street art pioneer Richard Hambleton painted The Berlin Wall for the first time, in May 1984, his 17 live-size Shadowmen shared the wall still mostly with political scribbles.

Who Is Afraid of Black Red and Yellow? Conceptual Street Art on The Wall by Richard Hambleton (1985)

More than a year later Hambleton returned to the Berlin wall to do a work that got quite some attention there at that time but was later almost forgotten and is usually not mentioned in English literature at all. This time Hambleton painted as the first known artist on a spot of the Berlin wall, which became the most prominent one to be painted by artists, a section next to the most known checkpoint, called Checkpoint Charlie: „By the time the Wall came down, Checkpoint Charlie had become the city’s most famous border crossing. As early as October 1961, it almost became the scene of a ‚hot‘ confrontation during the Cold War, when American and Soviet tanks faced each other with their engines running. A year later, 18-year-old Peter Fechter bled to death near Checkpoint Charlie during a failed escape attempt. At the same time, the checkpoint

became famous for more than 1,200 successful escapes, because many GDR citizens used its special status to pass through the border crossing unchecked, disguised as diplomats or soldiers. In 1963, the Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie opened its doors on the western side of the checkpoint. It documented the history of the Wall as well as the fate of refugees and quickly became internationally known because it was the eye of the needle for foreign tourists entering East Berlin.“¹⁷

At Checkpoint Charlie wall artists got the most attention for their art as most Berlin tourists went there to take photos. 1984/85 there was a complex, complete redesign of all Checkpoint Charlie structures,¹⁸ among them also the part, which Hambleton seemed to have been the first to paint on with a larger composition. Photos from ca. 1984/85 show only small scribbles on this later prominent part of the wall.¹⁹

Hambleton called his conceptual wall painting „Who Is Afraid of Black, Red, and Yellow?“ (fig. 1-4). He covered 20 metres of the Berlin Wall in black paint, with a thin red line at one end, a yellow one at the other, thus recalling the colors of the German flag in different order—and an unpainted 20-centimetre gap in the middle.²⁰

In this work Hambleton - always dressed in black (fig. 3), often called „The Shadowman“ as his most prominent works are haunting black graffiti silhouettes - refers to an old children catching game called „Who is afraid of the Black Man?“²¹, already a classic when first described in 1796. The black man is death, or more concrete, the

16 - Kuhrmann 2011, S. 151-152.

17 - Sybille Frank: Der Mauer um die Wette gedenken. 10.01.2012, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/deutsche-teilung-deutsche-einheit/52967/der-mauer-um-die-wette-gedenken/> [translation by the author].

18 - Leo Schmidt, Sophia Hörmannsdorfer: Checkpoint Charlie. Expertise zu den Resten und Spuren auf dem Gelände der ehemaligen Grenzübergangsstelle (GÜSt) Friedrichstraße/Zimmerstraße [Auszug]. Cottbus 2017, p. 4-6.

19 - See photos by Burkhard Maus and Philipp Bösel taken 22.6.1984, Bundesarchiv, photo numbers 2100513-2100516. See also alternative photos:

Jim Grey [photographer], At Checkpoint Charlie, July 1984, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mobilene/4091770406/>; „NEUE ZEIT - UNION-VERLAG“ „SCHEIßE“, Zimmerstraße, Kreuzberg, 1985, <https://west-berlin.tumblr.com/post/111459409126/neue-zeit-union-verlag-schei%C3%9Ffe>; Hans Christian Davidsen [photographer], Die Berliner Mauer und verriegelte Häuser in Ostberlin, March 1984, <https://www.staedte-fotos.de/bild/Deutschland~Berlin~Stadtansichten/57103/die-berliner-mauer-und-verriegelte-haeuser.html>

20 - Ralf Gründer: Verboten. Berliner Mauerkunst. Cologne 2007, p. 272.

21 - George Ellsworth Johnson: Education by Plays and Games. In: Granville Stanley Hall: The Pedagogical Seminary. J. H. Orpha, Worcester, Massachusetts 1894, p. 126.

black death, the plague, once you are touched you have lost. Particularly due to the establishment of parts of the German gymnastics movement in the U.S. after 1850, Der schwarze Mann became a part of „physical education“ at state institutions.²² This game included a lot of running away [from the black man]. Hambleton was used to running away from authorities painting illegal graffiti since the mid 1970ies. The Berlin Wall was established to stop people from running away.

Who's Afraid of...?

Already in the late 1950ies,²³ the song „Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?“ from Walt Disney's Three Little Pigs (1933), was found as a graffiti in New York joints, substituting the wolf with the name of known British author Virginia Woolf, later used as a title for a play of the same name by Edward Albee: „I was in there [a saloon in New York] having a beer one night, and I saw „Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?“ scrawled in soap, I suppose, on this mirror. When I started to write the play it cropped up in my mind again. And of course, who's afraid of Virginia Woolf means who's afraid of the big bad wolf . . . who's afraid of living life without false illusions. And it did strike me as being a rather typical, university intellectual joke.“²⁴

In 1966 until his death in 1970, abstract expressionism color field painter Barnett Newman made a known series of four large-scale paintings called Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue, inspired by Albee's play.²⁵ A few years before Hambleton painted the Berlin wall with this mural, the Berlin National Gallery had bought Newman's „Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue No. IV“ for 2.7 Million, at that time perceived as a lot of public money spend for a

painting a large part of the public rejected at that time. On April 13, 1982, a 29-year old veterinary student named Josef Nikolaus Kleer attacked this painting while it was on display at the National Gallery in Berlin. He first used a security barrier to hit the painting a few times, and then placed a series of notes and media pictures on and around it and numerous hand-written notes bearing slogans like, “Whoever does not yet understand it must pay for it! Price: on arrangement.”²⁶ When Kleer later admitted to the attack, he said it was because the painting was a „perversion of the German flag“, and that public funds should not be used to buy art because artists earned too much money.)²⁷ The hint to the German flag, which Hambleton adapted for his work, appeared also in the tabloid newspaper Berliner Zeitung a week after the act of vandalism, a reader named Dr. Cillie R. wrote:²⁸ „My work is black-red-gold. As a consolation and substitute I offer the director of the National Gallery a work of my own: six meters long, three meters high, wide black stripe, narrow red stripe, wide golden stripe, title: ‚Who is the lunatic here?‘ I have immortalized all my life experience in it. The prize of 2.7 million marks goes to the „Women's Shelters“ foundation (annual costs for a women's shelter: one million marks).“

The restauration of the Newman painting took two years and was completed around the time when Hambleton painted the Berlin Wall for the first time in 1984. Like Cillie R. also Hambleton referred not so much to Newman's Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue No. IV, (the one in the National Gallery), but to Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue No. I and especially number III. On the Berlin wall, Hambleton made a then very contemporary statement about what status contemporary art, conceptual art, and

22 - William Wells Newell: Games of Chase. In: Games and Songs of American Children. Harper & Brothers, New York 1883, S. 167.

23 - W. McIntyre and John McCarten: Unintimidated. In: The New Yorker, November 22, 1957, p. 44-45; <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1957/11/30/unintimidated>

24 - Flanagan, William (Fall 1966). "The Art of Theater No. Edward Albee" The Paris Review. 4 (39).

25 - Strickland, Edward (1993). Minimalism: Origins. Indiana University Press. p. 68.

26 - Michael Zöllner: Keine Angst vor Rot, Gelb und Blau! In: Berliner Zeitung, 07.11.2023, <https://www.bz-berlin.de/berlin/mitte/keine-angst-vor-rot-gelb-und-blau>

27 - <https://web.archive.org/web/20160324165200/http://artcrimes.net/who%26%23039%3Bs-afraid-red,-yellow-and-blue-iv,-1969-70>

28 - Leserbriefseite aus dem Westberliner Boulevardblatt B.Z., April 22, 1982.

In: Gamboni, Dario: Zerstörte Kunst. Bildersturm und Vandalismus im 20. Jahrhundert, Cologne 1998, No. 90, p. 218.

vandalism had in Germany at the time. He added or left out a small gap in the middle of his Newman homage that hinted actually at Newman's painting *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue No. IV*, but also at the Berlin Wall, the iron curtain which symbolically became a torn curtain through that gap, recalling the title of a Hitchcock movie and again the old catching game: „Who is afraid of the Black Man?“ „No one!“ „What will you do when the Black Man comes?“ „Run through like we ought to do!“²⁹ Hambleton posed exactly in front of that circa 20 cm unpainted gap when photographed with his work „Who Is Afraid of Black, Red, and Yellow?“ (fig. 3). He symbolically ran through the Berlin wall. „For me this painting has symbolic meaning. It [...] represents a shadow, the shadow of Germany. One can look at it as a school blackboard. I hope people will write serious things on it.“³⁰ commented Hambleton. German photographer Heinz Kzudas, the one who photo-documented Hambleton's *Who is afraid of the Black Red Yellow?* during he painting process (fig. 2 and 3) and who extensively documented Berlin Wall paintings for years, was one of the first to follow this instruction (fig. 1 and 4), in the spiteful words of his fellow Berlin Wall author Ralf Gründer: „Photographer Heinz J. Kuzdas sprayed a stencil graffiti [...] on the black areas of the picture the night after the completion of the artwork painted by Richard Hambleton. In doing so, he applied the special form of stencilgraffiti by repeating his motif seemingly endlessly. Here the principle of the free rider graffiti artist becomes clear. Insignificant artists use the works of famous professional colleagues as backgrounds and hope for adoption into art historical literature by documentary photographers and art historians.“³¹ Gründer's comment devaluates a competitor and with it the artistic use of stencil graffiti per se. Maybe

Gründer did not know Hambleton did ask to use his work as a blackboard, maybe a reference to famous blackboard artist Beuys, or to the graffiti origin of the *Who's afraid of the Virginia Wolf* reminiscence. Kzudas, however, later published a photo of his stencils on Hambleton's work also without mentioning Hambleton at all.³²

Making The Wall visible again - Der Weiße Strich (The White Line)

The Checkpoint Charlie wall, inaugurated by Hambleton, later was painted also by the most known Berlin wall painters, French artists Christophe Bouchet and Terry Noir, who painted several stenciled statues of liberty there on Independence Day July 4th, 1986, overpainted with yellow color within months by workers of the Checkpoint Charlie Museum who primed the wall for an invited mural by Keith Haring painted October 23, 1986.³³ Haring's mural of a human chain, again in the colors of the German flag, lasted only 12 days - when a white line was painted over it on November 3rd, 1986 (fig. 5).

Through painting, spraying, and artistic transformation, the „outer wall of real-existing socialism“ became the longest work of art in the world from 1983 onwards, which increased its already high appeal for tourists from all over the world.³⁴ Many of the wall painters, graffiti artists, action artists, and writers understood their work predominantly as a political statement. Through their artistic „border violation,“ they wanted to expose the bulwark to „permanent ridicule“³⁵ and, according to the title of the competition held by the Haus am Checkpoint Charlie in 1983/84, contribute to „overcoming the wall by painting it.“ „Paint down the wall,“³⁶ the manifesto title of the wall painter Kiddy Citny, was the driving force of many. At the

29 - Nelle M. Mustain: *Black Man*. In: *Popular Amusements for in and out of Doors*. Lyman A. Martin, Chicago 1902, p. 235.

30 - *Wer hat Angst vor schwarz, rot, gold? Ein Künstler aus New York bemalte ein 20 Meter[...], in: BZ, 24.08.1985.*[Re translation by Ulrich Blanché].

31 - Ralf Gründer: *Verboten*. Berliner Mauerkunst. Cologne 2007, p. 272.

32 - „Zimmerstraße I Wilhelmstraße 1985 Heinz J. Kuzdas: *Positiv Vibration*“, capture of a Kuzdas photo illustrated in Heinz J. Kuzdas: *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Berlin 1990, p. 16.

33 - Heinz J. Kuzdas: *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Berlin 1990, p. 44-45.

34 - Kuhrmann 2011, p. 152-154.

35 - Ralf Gründer: *Verboten*. Berliner Mauerkunst. Cologne 2007, p. 37.

36 - Ralf Gründer: *Verboten*. Berliner Mauerkunst. Cologne 2007, p. 220.

same time, the colorful and often cheerful wall paintings led to the „trivialization“ of the border. And so the SED - even if it had not planned to do so - had achieved what it set out to do with the „pioneering technical expansion“: in addition to a greater barrier effect and increased stability, the main aim was to improve the visual impression of the border fortifications. For precisely this reason, the colorful wall art came in for criticism, not least from fellow artists who intervened artistically in addition to verbal rejections. The campaign „Der Weiße Strich“ („The White Line“) was particularly conspicuous in its criticism:³⁷ Der Weiße Strich, the white line (fig. 5) was the name of an art action by five artists from GDR town Weimar, who relocated to West Berlin. Already in Weimar they had been punks und peace activists, some politically imprisoned, all monitored by the Stasi for years. Jürgen Onißeit had the first idea, they planned the wall to be completely whitewashed and resurrected as the neutral, terrifying surface it was perceived as from the East Berlin side.³⁸ They started painting on November 3rd, 1986, Jürgen Onißeit took up a paintbrush and wrote a slogan on the wall, referring to the „personal ghetto wall“ that they intended to make recognizable with this action. Their aim was then to paint the entire Wall with a clearly visible white line in order to take away its easel-like character, because in their view, the existing Wall paintings trivialized the actual function of the Berlin Wall. At the same time, the action was intended to illustrate the limitations that the Wall placed on the lives of the people of West Berlin. The wall painters wore plaster masks during the action to make themselves unrecognizable. When they started at Mariannenplatz in Kreuzberg, where some of them lived,³⁹ they planned to mark the entire Berlin Wall in five days. But already on the second day, after only a few kilometers, at Lenne-Dreieck, four GDR border guards who had come through a concealed door in the Wall hid in the undergrowth of

the Tiergarten. Wolfram Hasch, one of the Wall painters, was arrested.⁴⁰ The operation was then called off. Hasch was sentenced to 20 months in prison. Coming out of a GDR prison as a political prisoner, Hasch went back to one after a few months in West Berlin after West Germany had bought him out for the first time in 1984. For making the boarder, the wall, this outdoor prison visible again, he had to go to prison for around 7 months, before West Germany bought him out again. He was sentenced to 18 months after already three months in remand. He became one of only a few actual prisoners, painting symbolic prison graffiti against the open air prison of The Berlin Wall - after and before he was in a real GDR prison.

With their protest at eye level the White line painters wanted to return The Wall to its true function by making the border, which had become invisible due to the many graffiti and wall paintings, visible again with a continuous white bar of paint. Via spray/paint The Wall was, according to Michael Diers, not only appropriated as „an instrument of communication, a connecting element,“ but also embellished, softened, made invisible: „Design is not only invisible [...], but can also help to make invisible, to camouflage aesthetically, without impairing the function - a process of aestheticizing politics through industrial design in the medium of the „Wall“.⁴¹

Through the white line, the wall was to be perceived again as a wall of shame, as an „Iron Curtain,“ because millions of people still lived behind it - almost forgotten by the West. They symbolically wanted to wipe out all Berlin wall art: „The wall must be seen at what it is. It is not a tourist attraction.“⁴² Other Berlin wall painters were not pleased, many restored their crossed out paintings.

The white line, although unfinished, had at least the plan to be a conceptual artwork on the whole wall, not just a section used as *pro toto* canvas.

37 - Kuhrmann 2011, S. 154.

38 - Anne Hahn, Frank Willmann (eds.): Der weiße Strich. Vorgeschichte und Folgen einer Kunstaktion an der Berliner Mauer, p. 52.

39 - Anne Hahn, Frank Willmann (eds.): Der weiße Strich. Vorgeschichte und Folgen einer Kunstaktion an der Berliner Mauer, p. 52.

40 - „...Und dann war Freund Hasch weg“, Ein Interview mit zwei Mauermalern, newspaper TAZ, 13.01.1987.

41 - Michael Diers: Di Mauer. Notizen zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte eines deutschen Symbol(l) Werks. In: kritische berichte 3/1992, p. 70 [translation by Ulrich Blanché].

42 - Anne Hahn, Frank Willmann (eds.): Der weiße Strich. Vorgeschichte und Folgen einer Kunstaktion an der Berliner Mauer, p. 52.

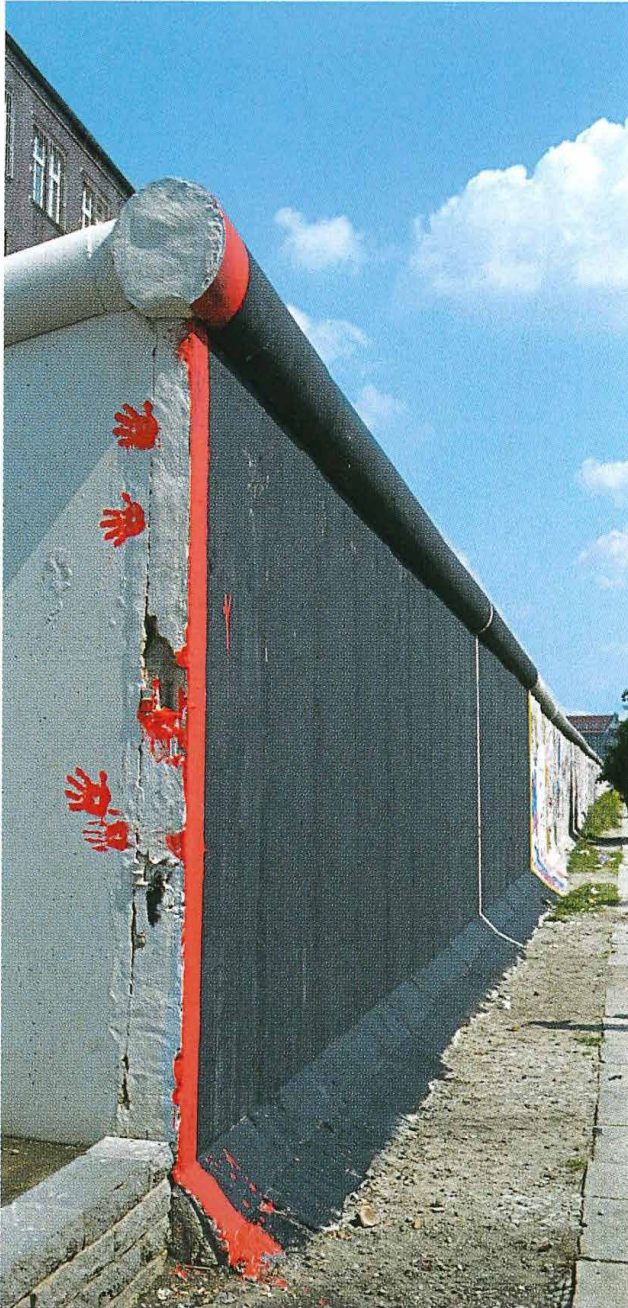
Conclusion

What reasons did painters of the Berlin Wall and their viewers or witnesses of their works had in the 1980s? The main goal of The Wall artists and their viewers was, however, at least superficially, a political one, to paint down the wall, or at least to release some anger, by posing with the wall or sending a postcard. Besides the opportunity to have a large-scale free canvas for anything, The Wall painters sometimes got high publicity, to paint whatever they liked. Artists used the wall also as an opportunity for self-advertising *and* politics, like Terry Noir, Christophe Bouchet or Keith Haring. Some of their Berlin Wall paintings were sold on postcards.

An artists goal to paint The Wall could also be more sophisticated, to visualize the complicated German relationship between conceptual art, vandalism and the iron curtain around 1984 like Richard Hambleton did, or to point to the fact that all these painting efforts made the wall also more beautiful, more capable for the people living there, as we know now, also a goal of the GDR leaders, who changed the appearance of the wall more than once in that direction. And artists like the White Liners, who tried to make all that visible and The Wall as what it was, a paradox prison wall again, where „inside“ is „outside“ and „outside“ is „inside“.



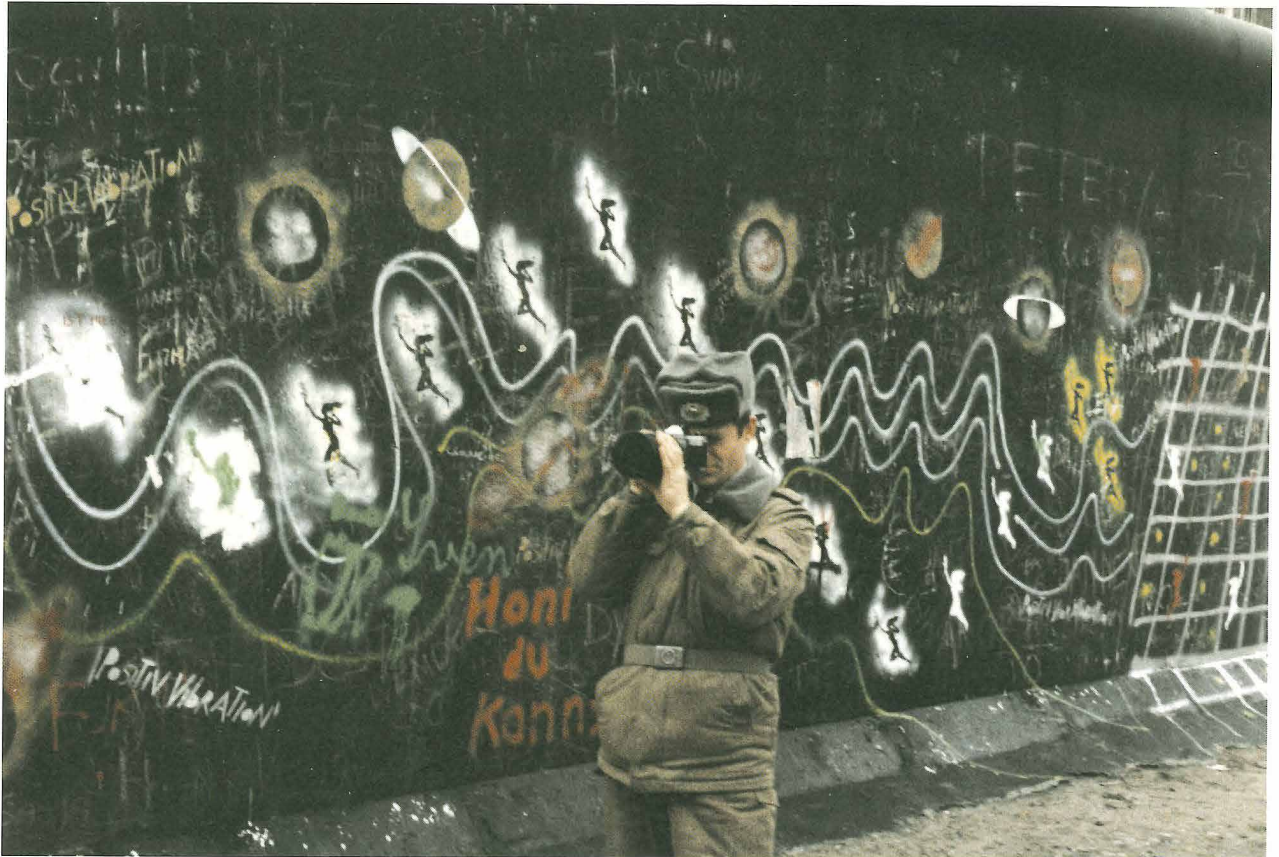
1 Richard Hambleton, Who is afraid of Black, red, gold?, with additional graffiti by Heinz Kuzdas et al., ca. 40 meters, Berlin Wall, Friedrichstrasse corner of Zimmerstrasse, next to Checkpoint Charlie, August 24, 1985. Photo: HJ Burmeister, August 25, 1985.



2 Richard Hambleton, Who is afraid of Black, red, gold? [with hand prints by Hambleton] , ca. 40 meters, Berlin Wall, Friedrichstrasse corner of Zimmerstrasse, next to Checkpoint Charlie, August 24, 1985. Photo: Heinz Kuzdas, August 24, 1985.



3 Richard Hambleton [with yellow hands] in front of his work *Who is afraid of Black, red, gold?*, with additional graffiti by Heinz Kuzdas et al., ca. 40 meters, Berlin Wall, Friedrichstrasse corner of Zimmerstrasse, next to Checkpoint Charlie, August 24, 1985. Photo: Heinz Kuzdas, August 24, 1985.



4 Richard Hambleton, Who is afraid of Black, red, gold? [with GDR soldier], with additional graffiti by Heinz Kuzdas et al., ca. 40 meters, Berlin Wall, Friedrichstrasse corner of Zimmerstrasse, next to Checkpoint Charlie, August 24, 1985. Photo: HJ Burmeister, August 25, 1985.



5 Der weiße Strich [The white Line], Berlin Wall, Friedrichstrasse corner of Zimmerstrasse, next to Checkpoint Charlie, November 3, 1985. Unknown photographer.

