

Learning How to Read: Solidarity and Antiracism in Late East German Socialist Realism

Tobias Rosen

Princeton University

Department of Art & Archeology

Burr Hall, 116 Aaron, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA

tr1905@princeton.edu

During decolonization and the Cold War, African students traveled to East Germany for education. Supporting these students, their decolonial ambitions, and development in their home countries was central to East German solidarity. Yet in the process, the students were drawn into a second educational task: reshaping how the East German public perceived race. Images of international students were published alongside newspaper articles about race as part of the state's agenda to implement a new racial system, composed of distinct racial groups, defined as equals in terms of intelligence and capacity to learn and read. Also in the late 1950s, East German cultural policy shifted toward the notion of the socialist personality, directing figurative art to engage with the psyche. East German artists depicted foreign students in the style of Socialist Realism, reflecting the convergence of the political and aesthetic pressures of the time. This essay discusses how solidarity and antiracism entered the style of late Socialist Realism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Contrary to the rationalistic, authoritative, and universalizing nature of the new racial system, paintings from this period demonstrate how solidarity and antiracism were differentiated in opinion, contradictory, and variable over time.

Keywords: Socialist Realism, antiracism, solidarity, decolonization, the Cold War, East Germany, socialist chromatism.

The VII World Festival is an expression by the peace-loving and forward-looking youth of the whole world to build a life of happiness and prosperity, following the principles of peaceful coexistence of all peoples and races.

Salute from East German President Wilhelm Pieck¹

The 1950s witnessed two deeply interlocking struggles: decolonization and the Cold War. People around the world revolted against the old colonial powers, fighting for independence and self-rule. At the same time, communism and capitalism clashed with renewed intensity, competing for influence in the newly independent nations.² Resuscitating the Leninist policies of proletarian internationalism from the 1920s, Nikita Khrushchev promoted increased interconnection and exchange among organizations, workers, and intellectuals in the socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe and those in formerly colonized regions—many of which, refusing allegiance to one side of the Cold War, joined the Non-Aligned Movement.³ In this context, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) implemented policies of solidarity, friendship, and anti-imperialism with partners in Africa, including trade agreements, exchanges between worker unions, the hosting of international students, and technical assistance for infrastructure and development projects.⁴ For the GDR, these newfound relationships with African countries were strategic investments, a way to secure socialism's future

- 1 All translations by the author. Wilhelm Pieck, "DDR begrüßt Weltfestspiele," *Neues Deutschland* (East Germany), July 29, 1959, 1.
- 2 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 3 Tobias Rupperecht, ed., "Introduction: The End of Soviet Isolationism after 1953," in *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–21; Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992)* (Boston: Brill, 2018).
- 4 Eric Burton and Immanuel R. Harisch, "Sozialistische Globalisierung: Tagebücher der DDR-Freundschaftsbrigaden in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika," *Studies in Contemporary History* 17 (2020): 578–91; Lukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Toni Weis, "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 351–67.

and counteract the isolating policies implemented by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).⁵

The East German government also declared itself to be antiracist. In Marxist-Leninist theory, racism was viewed as a means of class oppression, a false justification for worker exploitation and concentrated ownership of the means of production under colonialism, slavery, or other extreme forms of inequality.⁶ Support for decolonial movements and other nation-building projects in Africa was therefore understood by the state as inherently antiracist. This stance was also intended to distance the GDR from both the National Socialist past and western democracies—like the United States—gripped by racial conflict.⁷ Historical scholarship, however, has shown that incidents of racism and grievances raised by immigrants in the GDR were largely ignored or dismissed.⁸ Though these retrospective assessments point out the state's oversights and failures, we should not understand that antiracism in the GDR was merely a matter of empty declarations with no impact on East German public life.

This essay examines geopolitical concepts from an art historical perspective. How did art contribute to the policies and rhetorical strategies of East German antiracism and socialist solidarity? Until recently, Quinn Slobodian's pathbreaking chapter "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany" was one of few studies to specifically focus on race in East German visual culture—let alone art.⁹ Slobodian examines how

- 5 William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1.
- 6 Maxim Matusevich, "Soviet Antiracism and its Discontents: The Cold War Years," in *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, ed. James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 229–61; Jinyi Chu, "Civilizational Myth and Class Politics: Lenin on China and Racial Revolution," *Comparative Literature* 75, no. 2 (June 1, 2023): 140–52.
- 7 Sara Pugach, "Agents of Dissent: African Student Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," *Africa* 89, no. S1 (2019): 90–108.
- 8 Eric Burton, "Rassismuskritik im Realsozialismus. Zu einem Beschwerdeschreiben afrikanischer Studenten in der DDR," *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* (2021), <https://www.europa.clcio-online.de/ess2ay/id/fdae-50101>; Peggy Piesche, "Black and German? East German Adolescents Before 1989: A Retrospective View of a 'Non-Existent Issue' in the GDR," in *The Cultural After-Life of East Germany: New Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Leslie A. Adelson (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2002), 37–59; Irene Runge, *Ausland DDR: Fremdenhass* (Berlin: Dietz, 1990).
- 9 Quinn Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 23–40.

race was “redefined” in East Germany after 1945, coining the term *socialist chromatism* to describe a harmonious, non-hierarchical system of discrete racial groups, as promoted through official posters and ephemera from the 1951 World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin [Fig. 1]. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the locus of solidarity and antiracism shifted to iconic images of galvanizing heroes, who were construed as “‘moral constructs’ rather than individuals” and have subsequently become the focus of museum exhibitions and art historical study.¹⁰ Posters and icons were valued for their visual economy, immediate legibility, and reproducibility—ideal attributes for the state’s macropolitical messaging.¹¹ By contrast, paintings are unique and resist closure, opening to shifts of meaning over time. The affect, demeanor, and comportment of figures within them are typically more refined and subtle than those in posters. Thus, to reconstruct the nuances of antiracism and solidarity, this study turns to paintings of youth and students from the late 1950s and early 1960s, bridging a gap between earlier Cold War posters and later pop Third World imagery. Paintings from this intermediary period show how the blanket system of socialist chromatism was broken down and metabolized at a personal level below state-sanctioned propaganda. Slobodian rightfully argues that “the visual repertoire of race and racism in the GDR reproduced many of the exaggerated and even offensive stereotypical depictions of people of color.”¹² And yet, some East German artists and critics were aware of this. The art historical record—comprising artworks and published criticism—demonstrates that painting served as a contested and contradictory site where some beliefs and stereotypes about solidarity and race were challenged, while others were reproduced and reinforced.

10 Slobodian quotes from Toni Weis’s article on solidarity, cited in note 4. Angela Davis became one of these icons in East Germany, see Kathleen Reinhardt, ed., *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2021).

11 In an essay on images of Angela Davis in East German visual culture, art historian and researcher Doreen Mende distinguishes between the macropolitical instrumentalization of Davis’s image as a fashionable icon, promulgated by the state high-ranking politicians, and the “micropolitical” role these images played in the East German education system. Doreen Mende, “Looking Closely: A Visual Pedagogy as Display of Politics (For Angela Davis),” in *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*, ed. Kathleen Reinhardt (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2021), 262.

12 Slobodian, “Socialist Chromatism,” 33.

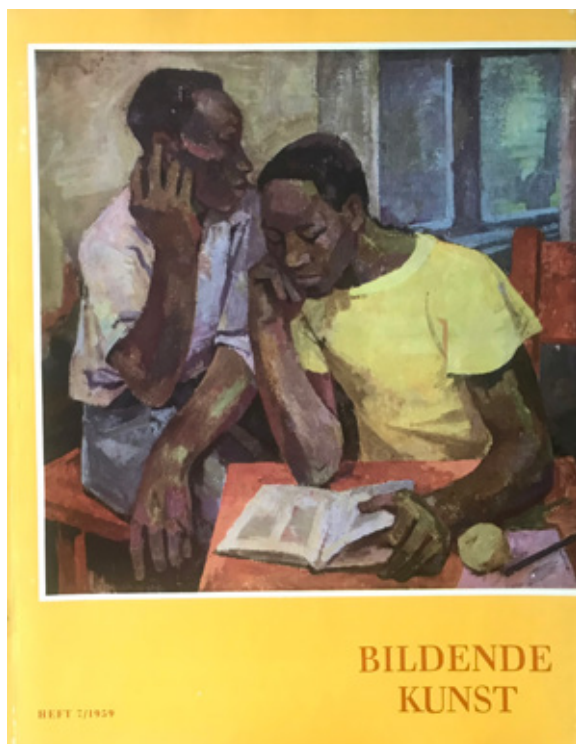


1. *Forward to the Third World Festival for Youth and Students*, poster published by the preparations committee, 1951, 84 × 58 cm, Courtesy of Philip Williams Posters

Pirmyn į Trečiąjį pasaulinį jaunimo ir studentų festivalį, plakatas, 1951, 84 × 58 cm

In 1958, the East German artist Karl Heinz Jakob painted *Afrikanische Studenten* (African Students), a portrait of two men seated beside one another at a desk [Fig. 2].¹³ One reads intently, his right hand gripping the pages of a book, his left propping up his head. The other peers over his shoulder, deep in thought. Both wear simple t-shirts; the walls are bare, and the furnishings are sparse, composed of flat, unornamented surfaces. The simplicity of the space—probably a classroom or student dormitory—is counterbalanced by painterly flourishes. Jakob employed a vivid palette and agitated, irregular textures to evoke depth and the interplay of light across surfaces. The men's skin, for example, is rendered in adjacent patches of green, brown, tan, and maroon, reminiscent of the peel of Paul Cézanne's multicolor apples (one of which makes a cameo on a sheet of paper in the

13 It is unclear how Jakob originally titled the painting. Some publications use the title *Afrikanische Studenten*, while others use the more problematic title *Negerstudenten* (Negro Students). For a similar discussion, see Tobias Rosen, "An East-German Painting of African Students at the VII World Festival in Vienna," *Art in Networks*, December 2022, <https://artinetworks.webspace.tu-dresden.de/en/beitraege/an-east-german-painting-of-african-students-at-the-vii-world-festival-in-vienna>.



2. Karl Heinz Jakob, *Afrikanische Studenten* (*African Students*), 1958, oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm, location unknown

Karl Heinz Jakob, *Afrikos studentai*, 1958, drobė, aliejus, 100 × 100 cm

foreground). Yellow-green streaks on the forearm of the man in the purple shirt connect him, along with the direction of his gaze, to the play of shadows outside the window, through which dimmer light enters the scholastic setting.

Juxtaposed lines of brighter and darker paint comprise the window's lattice, faintly evoking the lighting effects found in German Expressionism, like those of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff [Fig. 3]. The windowpane itself in Jakob's canvas resists easy interpretation. Amid the muddled tones, one can discern floating silhouettes—one in purple, just to the left of the vertical lattice, another in yellow-green, more centrally positioned in the right pane—though it is uncertain if they were intended by the artist. The window does not reflect the men's skin color; instead, their t-shirt colors fill the silhouettes. The flickering shapes appear as the men's doubles or mirages, liable to dissolve into nothingness. In contrast, the book—placed



3. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,
Platz am Fenster
(*By the Window*),
1948, oil on canvas,
87 × 101 cm, Brücke-
Museum. LATGA,
Vilnius 2025

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,
Prie lango, 1948, drobė,
aliejus, 87 × 101 cm.
LATGA, Vilnius 2025

prominently at the center of the table and brightly illuminated—serves as a compositional and conceptual counterweight to the darker, more imaginative portal behind, providing graspable knowledge as an opposition to the dreamier atmosphere suggested by the painting’s formal features.

Jakob’s painting was first exhibited at a youth art festival in East Berlin—the *Exhibition of Young Artists* at the Pavillon der Kunst, held from May 30 to June 30, 1959—alongside works by 200 other artists.¹⁴ It was then selected by a youth jury for a second exhibition at the VII World Festival of Youth and Students in Vienna, where thousands of attendees from numerous countries had the opportunity to see it.¹⁵ A painting of African students was fitting for East Germany’s contribution because it encapsulated details of both the state’s recent history and broader shifts in the strategy of the youth festivals during the late 1950s.

Since the beginning of the youth festivals in 1947, the Soviet Union had used them as platforms for cultural diplomacy, promoting messages of peace, support for national independence, and antinuclear sentiments. The

14 The catalogue includes a black-and-white reproduction of Jakob’s painting: *Ausstellung Junger Künstler* (Berlin: Freie Deutsche Jugend Zentralrat & Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959).

15 *Internationale Ausstellung Junger Künstler* (Vienna: Nationales Komitee der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1959).

goal was to foster solidarity among left-leaning youth around the world and learn about youth organizations from other socialist countries, as well as those from the West.¹⁶ With the rise of decolonial movements, Soviet leaders invited more guests from the Third World to the festivals and organized more activities on the topic of decolonization. Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev viewed the charismatic leaders of nascent countries, such as Egypt's Nasser or India's Nehru, as potential allies. He envisioned the festivals as opportunities to gather information about youth from colonized and recently decolonized regions, especially their political visions for the future.¹⁷ The decolonial agenda was first implemented at the 1957 festival in Moscow and expanded further at the 1959 iteration in Vienna.¹⁸ A declassified CIA document, for example, reported that "the propaganda themes of the Vienna Festival will also be in large part a repetition of those of the 1957 Festival... Appeals to the young people of the colonial and other underdeveloped areas (including the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin-America) will be one of the most insistent features."¹⁹ Hosting the 1959 event in a neutral city outside the communist bloc was a strategic move designed to attract more students from Non-Aligned countries. Indeed, while overall attendance had peaked in 1957, a higher proportion of delegates at the 1959 event came from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.²⁰ The Vienna festival hosted a party on its fifth day dedicated to "friendship and solidarity with the colonial youth," along with seminars focused on the role of students in the economic, political, and cultural development of regions that were either fighting for or had recently gained independence.²¹

Jakob's painting illustrated the GDR's contribution to the efforts of solidarity and friendship by drawing attention to the presence of African students at East German universities. Using a Socialist Realist style, the painting suggested that African socialism—or the future of postcolonial

16 Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

17 Ibid., 242–3.

18 For a specific discussion of Vienna, see "Epilogue" in Ibid., 261–4.

19 "Between Two Communist World Youth Festivals: Moscow 1957 – Vienna 1959," Central Intelligence Agency, December 1, 1958, 73.

20 Ibid., 66. For similar information see *The Background of the 7th World Youth Festival: A Report* (Cambridge: Independent Service for Information on the Vienna Youth Festival, 1959).

21 "Solidarität mit der Kolonialjugend," *Neue Zeit*, August 1, 1959.

Africa—would move towards East Germany's Marxist-Leninism, though their alignment was never so definite.²² Famously, the first African students to matriculate in the GDR came from Nigeria, traveling to East Germany for the 1951 Youth Festival and remaining afterward. Their arrival precipitated the establishment of the Herder-Institute, where most foreign students learned German before beginning university studies.²³ In response to a mining catastrophe in Nigeria, the Free German Youth (FDJ)—one of the principal East German organizations involved in the youth festivals—brokered scholarships with Nigerian labor unions for students. The goal was to develop partnerships with Nigerian organizations ahead of the country's independence in 1960 and to provoke the British colonial administration, which viewed the scholarships unfavorably. Throughout the remainder of the 1950s, a limited number of students from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Cameroon, Mali, Tanzania, Zambia, and Kenya arrived in the GDR, mostly pursuing technical degrees such as engineering, chemistry, or medicine.²⁴ Their numbers were significantly smaller than the influx of students from Mozambique, Angola, and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s—the period more commonly associated with African immigration to East Germany.²⁵ When Jakob painted *Afrikanische Studenten* in 1958, traveling to and studying in East Germany was still a new experience for African students, and

- 22 William H. Friedland, *African Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964). Sheku Magona, a student from Sierra Leone who studied in the GDR in the 1960s, wrote his dissertation, nearly forgotten today, on tensions between Marxist-Leninism and *Ujamaa*, a socialist political philosophy that formed the basis of Julius Nyerere's government in Tanzania: Sheku S. Magona, *Philosophische Probleme in der nationalen Befreiungsbewegung Afrika an Hand der philosophischen Anschauungen Nyereres mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Freiheitskonzeption* (PhD diss., Karl-Marx-Universität, 1970).
- 23 Wilma Gramkow, *Das Herder-Institute in Leipzig im Wandel der Zeiten, 1961–1990* (PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 2006), 7; Sara Pugach, "Eleven Nigerian Students in Cold War East Germany: Visions of Science, Modernity, and Decolonization," *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 3 (2019): 551–72.
- 24 Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022); Damian Mac Con Uladh, "'Studium bei Freunden?' Ausländische Studierende in der DDR bis 1970," in *Ankunft – Alltag – Ausreise: Migration und interkulturelle Begegnung in der DDR-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Anke Gebert and Kristina Hübener (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 175–220.
- 25 Marcia C. Schenck, *Remembering African Labor Migration to the Second World: Socialist Mobilities between Angola, Mozambique, and East Germany* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022), <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/60135>.

their presence at universities remained novelty for the East German public. Jakob's painting may have served to attract more international students at the Vienna festival, potentially advancing the spread of Marxism-Leninism around the world.

Following the festival, *Afrikanische Studenten* was featured in color on the cover of *Bildende Kunst* (Plastic Arts), East Germany's most important publication for art criticism and history, as part of a review covering the exhibitions in Berlin and Vienna. Art historian Ullrich Kuhirt begins his review by praising select works as a welcome step towards "overcoming the cleft between art and life" and "forming consciousness of citizens of [the] republic into socialist spirit."²⁶ These initial remarks are near-stock phrases drawn from cultural theory and policy discourse between 1958 and 1964, the dates marking the First Bitterfeld Conference and a series of critical debates that led to the softening of the definition of Socialist Realism and the prohibition on formalism, respectively.²⁷ The *Bitterfelder Weg* (Bitterfeld Path), an extensive set of initiatives and cultural policies formalized at the conference, attempted to bridge the divide between art and life by urging artists to collaborate with unions, visit factories, and portray workers, while encouraging workers to make art and attend exhibitions. Even before 1958, Jakob had participated in these efforts, painting a series about coal miners at a local shaft near his hometown in Zwickau.²⁸ His long-term involvement with manual labor may explain the burly, working-class features of the men in *Afrikanische Studenten*, conveyed through their plain attire and disproportionately large hands, which rival the size of their heads.

Kuhirt's seemingly odd refrain about fashioning "socialist spirit" stemmed from topical discourses on social engineering at the time. At the

26 Ullrich Kuhirt, "Malerei und Plastik junger Künstler," *Bildende Kunst* 7 (1959): 436.

27 For more information about the *Bitterfelder Weg*, see: Günter Feist and Eckhart Gillen, eds., *Kunstkombinat DDR: Daten und Zitate zur Kunst und Kunstpolitik der DDR 1945–1990* (Berlin: Nishen, 1990); Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom Sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus: die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001); Maike Steinkamp, *Das unerwünschte Erbe: die Rezeption "entarteter" Kunst in Kunstkritik, Ausstellungen und Museen der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der frühen DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008).

28 As part of the initiative "Kunst hilft Kohle" (Art Helps Coal), a forerunner of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, Jakob spent time in 1958 at the "Martin Hoop" mine in Zwickau, making portraits of the workers. Manuela Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion: Bildende Kunst und volkseigene Wirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 161.

5. *Parteitag der SED* (Fifth Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party [of East Germany])), referenced by Kuhirt in the first paragraph of his review, First Secretary of the Communist Party Walter Ulbricht issued “The Ten Commandments of Socialist Morality,” inaugurating a campaign to create a “new man” in the spirit of socialism, adapted from Soviet models.²⁹ Among calls for comradeship, cleanliness, and family loyalty, Ulbricht’s final commandment instructed East Germans to “exercise solidarity with people who fight for their national freedom and defend their national independence.”³⁰ In addition to these concrete prescriptions, the state sought to cultivate socialist personalities and psyches, especially among youth, with efforts centered in the education system.³¹ This interest in the psyche was also incorporated in the theory of Socialist Realism, as a depiction of society in the process of socialist transformation—a dimension that has received relatively little art historical attention, despite ample evidence for it in the pages of *Bildende Kunst*. Figurative painters sought to model the psychological moods of socialist transformation, while art critics and art historians looked for and evaluated these features.³² Thus, the challenge of painting solidarity and antiracism was subject to the aesthetic constraints specific to this late period of Socialist Realism: on the one hand, to unite art and labor, and on the other, to represent the processes of social engineering. In Jakob’s painting of African students, the central representational challenge is double: to make visible, in a single moment, two phenomena—solidarity and the psyche—that are either processual or occur in the recesses of the mind.

The first artwork described in Kuhirt’s review is *Junger Pionier* (Young Pioneer), titled after a scouting organization for children, by the

29 Walter Ulbricht, “10 Gebote Der Sozialistischen Moral,” in *FDGB-Lexikon*, 2009, http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/texte/sachteil/z/10_Gebote_der_sozialistischen_Moral.html; Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the “New Man”: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqzq7>.

30 “10 Gebote Der Sozialistischen Moral.”

31 Angela Brock, “Producing the ‘Socialist Personality’?,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979*, ed. Mary Fulbrook, NED (Berghahn Books, 2009), 220–52.

32 Peter H. Feist, who was not an official party art historian and is unrelated to Günter Feist, saw greater engagement with psychology as an urgent task of de-Stalinization in the field of *Kunstwissenschaft* (art science, as distinct from art history). See Peter H. Feist, “Principles and Methods of Marxist Kunstwissenschaft – Attempt at an Outline,” trans. Tamara Golan and Felix Jäger, *Selva* 5 (2024): 26–52; Nicos Hadjinicolaou, “Shreds of a Dialogue on Marxist Art History During the Cold War,” *Selva* 5 (2024): 53–71.



4. Walter Womacka, *Junger Pionier* (*Young Pioneer*), 1959, oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm, location unknown. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Walter Womacka, *Jaunoji pionierė*, 1959, drobė, aliejus, 80 × 60 cm. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

comparatively more famous artist Walter Womacka [Fig. 4]. A young girl in a red sweatshirt with rolled-up sleeves gazes starry-eyed at the viewer, confident and prepared. Kuhirt finds the idealized picture “interesting,”

because the artist’s determined efforts to move away from a flat, decorative manner and penetrate artistically deeper into the essence of the human being can be felt here, without giving up the advantage of decorative painting, the visual charm. There is still a contradiction in the picture between psychological saturation and decorative design [der psychologischen Durchdringung und der dekorativen Gestaltung]—in this respect, the work does not offer complete artistic unity. But the painter did succeed in fashioning a truly typical figure of a young pioneer from our times. Her being charmingly unites carefree, childlike cheerfulness, seriousness, and self-awareness.³³



5. Pablo Picasso, *World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace Scarf*, 1951, 76 × 71.5 cm. Courtesy of Helle Thygesen. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Pablo Picasso, *Skarelė, skirta Pasauliniam jaunimo ir studentų taikos festivaliui*, 1951, 76 × 71.5 cm. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

At first glance, the patterned background may seem like an ordinary banner—a safer choice than the ambiguous setting in Jakob's painting. However, the backdrop quotes a scarf designed by Picasso for the 1951 Youth Festival in Berlin [Fig. 5], though this reference is hardly discernible in the black-and-white reproduction of Kuhirt's review. Since Picasso's politics and artistic style oscillated in and out of favor in East Germany, Kuhirt's description points to a Cold War aesthetic conflict within the work: between the flat, decorative elements in the background and the volumetric rendering of the figure, who embodies the psychological depth of the socialist future.³⁴ In calling attention to this conflict, the politics of antiracism and solidarity quietly recede, nowhere mentioned explicitly in Kuhirt's prose. In

34 Maria Lau, *Die Picasso-Rezeption in der DDR: offizielle Wahrnehmung und künstlerischer Dialog* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011); Olga Picasso et al., *Der geteilte Picasso: Der Künstler und sein Bild in der BRD und der DDR*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2021).

Picasso's scarf, a dove bearing an olive branch is surrounded by black, red, yellow, and white faces—a peace pact among four racial groups. These colorful profiles echo both Picasso's interest in masks and the schematic illustrations of racial pseudoscience—rare hybrid forms that merge what Slobodian termed “socialist chromatism” with modernist citation of African art. On one level, then, Womacka's painting reveals, in rather blatant terms, the limitations of East German thinking, placing a single white German figure in front of a field of interracial solidarity. On another level, however, Kuhirt implies that socialist personality—and, by extension, genuine solidarity—requires highly nuanced psychological interiority, not merely eye-catching decorative pattern.

Without comparing the paintings directly, Kuhirt describes *Afrika-nische Studenten* in remarkably similar terms to *Junger Pionier*:

Karl Heinz Jakob's *Negro Students* (our cover picture) also captivate the viewer with generous color arrangement. The picture announces the newness that is establishing itself in the lives of the former colonial peoples, even though the psychological saturation of the figures [*psychologische Durchdringung der Gestalten*] leaves something left to wish for and flatness still dominates far too strongly.³⁵

In both descriptions, what exactly Kuhirt means by *psychologische Durchdringung* remains ambiguous. The phrase can be translated as “psychological saturation,” but also as “psychological penetration,” suggesting both the presence of a fully realized inner life within the artwork and a space punctured from the outside and filled by the viewer's psyche—another contradiction. What is “left to wish for” in Jakob's painting may be a more specific mood; perhaps Kuhirt finds the sober, introverted demeanor of Jakob's African students too inaccessible, especially compared to the cheerful confidence of Womacka's pioneer. While Womacka's figure embodies the happy, seemingly forced affect commonly associated with Socialist Realism—and often dismissed as mere propaganda—Jakob's figures are less familiar and less readily categorized.

The contradiction pointed out by Kuhirt—his emphasis on psychological penetration, his disapproval of flatness and intense color—reveals the unresolved status of expressive components in East German aesthetics, including his own opinions. This conflict can be traced back to the infamous Expressionism debates of the 1930s, which drew on more than a century of philosophical and artistic thought, from Romanticism to Naturalism and eventually to the aesthetics of fascism. In this polemic, Marxist critic Georg Lukács and Alfred Kurella, who later became East Germany's chief cultural functionary, denounced Expressionism. For them, the movement, emerging amid intensifying societal conflicts brought about by the growth of global capitalism, the expansion of colonialism, and increasing economic inequality, externalized subjective idealism from the Romantic period into the visible world of history and content. However, it did so neither to fundamentally challenge nor clarify those conflicts and contradictions, but rather to distort and obscure them.³⁶ Rather than analyzing the objective realities of capitalism and imperialism, Expressionist artists, Lukács argued, projected their subjective “passion” or fantasies onto the external world, which they already perceived as “chaos.” Due to this damning critique—rejected at the time by other prominent thinkers like the German philosopher Ernst Bloch—Expressionism was provisionally prohibited in the GDR in the early 1950s and remained a subject of ongoing debate thereafter.³⁷ Naturalism, which, according to Lukács, maintained an “oppositional” and “anti-capitalist” edge” due to its close relationship with the working class, found slightly more acceptance in the GDR. Nonetheless, artists were often encouraged to move beyond Naturalism toward Socialist Realism—that is, to depict how socialist society could overcome the harsh conditions under capitalism. Kuhirt's equivocal phrase, *psychologische Durchdringung*, reflects the pressures of these debates. Jakob, moreover, attempts to incorporate a limited set of modernist techniques—drawn from either Expressionism or Naturalism—not to obfuscate colonialism and imperialism, but to bolster anti-imperialist politics. A more moderate version of Socialist Realism had

36 “Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus,” *Internationale Literatur* 1 (1934): 153–73; Bernhard Ziegler (pseudonym of Alfred Kurella), “Nun ist dies Erbe zuende . . .,” *Das Wort* 9 (1937).

37 For a recap of the famous Expressionism debates, see Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980).



6. Rudolf Bergander, *Hausfriedenskomitee* (House Peace Committee), 1952, oil on canvas, 130 × 170 cm, Albertinum, Gal. No. 2961 © Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Photo by Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Rudolf Bergander, *Kaimynų taikos komitetas*, 1952, drobė, aliejus, 130 × 170 cm, Albertinum, Gal. No. 2961 © Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut nuotrauka. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

emerged in late 1950s, one that distanced itself from the one-sided dogmatism of the 1930s.

Jakob followed in the footsteps of his professor Rudolf Bergander at the Dresden Academy of Art, where he studied between 1951 and 1955. Bergander's well-known painting *Hausfriedenskomitee* (House Peace Committee, 1952) anticipates many features of *Afrikanische Studenten* [Fig. 6]. Both depict readers gathered around a brightly colored red table and employ loose, energetic brushwork reminiscent of Expressionism. According to historian Barbara McCloskey, Bergander "attempted to steer a middle course by looking at [the] Soviet example [and] a broader tradition of leftist art [citing table scenes by Courbet and Kollwitz] ... In its didactic content, yet restrained modernist style, his work tested the limits of socialist realist doctrine in 1953."³⁸ Following its presentation at the *Third German Art Exhibition* that year, *Hausfriedenskomitee* was heavily criticized for its awkward composition and narrative opacity, especially for how its two main figures turn away from the viewer.³⁹ Seen only in oblique profile, the facial features of the woman in green are soft and undefined, as if wet oil paints

38 Barbara McCloskey, "Dialectic at a Standstill: East German Socialist Realism in the Stalin Era," in *Art of Two Germanys—Cold War Cultures*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (New York: Abrams, 2009).

39 Kurt Magnitz, "Die Wahrheit der Kunst ist die Wahrheit des Lebens. Zur 3. Deutschen Kunstausstellung in Dresden," *Bildende Kunst* 2 (1953): 34–44, summarized in McCloskey, "Dialectic at a Standstill."

have been smeared, creating a gap in communication between her and her male counterpart, between the newspaper and the book. Her amorphous face conveys a sense of unease, bordering on inscrutability, a marker of the difficulty in translating from text to feeling to image. The masklike face of the man on the left in *Afrikanische Studenten* recalls the woman reading in *Hausfriedenskomitee*. His hollowed eye—perhaps borrowed from Picasso or the German painter Karl Hofer—and the direction of his attention away from the viewer, toward the perplexing window in the background, prevent access to his psyche. His expression seems reserved, pensive, possibly even anxious about what lies ahead. These difficult, illegible feelings are likely what left Kuhirt unsatisfied and may have conveyed an ambiguous message about the conditions facing African students in the GDR.

However, contrary to Kuhirt's description, the students do convey the nuances of reading, capturing two crucial psychological aspects of the activity within a single frame: the absorption of information and the moment of reflection. The figure with softer features, on the right, demonstrates pointed concentration on the page, while the man on the left, with his more upright posture, exemplifies how deep contemplation can pull visual focus away. The alternation between the two recalls Roland Barthes's provocative question: "Haven't you ever happened *to read while looking up from your book?*"⁴⁰

Even Günter Feist, who was far more critical of Socialist Realist orthodoxy than Kuhirt, encouraged painters to aim for psychological depth.⁴¹ In an article titled "Milestones of the Bitterfeld Path," Feist warned that the

40 Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 29.

41 In 1964, Feist argued against artistic censorship and advocated for loosening restrictions on Socialist Realism. He was subsequently heavily criticized and forced to resign from his position at Humboldt University. See Günter Feist, "Wir müssen uns schwerer machen," *Bildende Kunst*, 12 (1963): 619–24; Frederike Eschen, "Positionen zur Moderne in der DDR am Beispiel der Zeitschrift Bildende Kunst," in *Bildgespenster Künstler Archive aus der DDR und ihr Rolle heute*, ed. Elize Bisanz and Marlene Heidel (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), 327–66. Ullrich Kuhirt, in contrast, was less antagonistic toward the regime. After World War II, he was a Soviet prisoner of war, later worked as a language teacher and a Russian-German translator for the SED's Central Committee. In this sense, he can be described as an "official party art historian." For more information on Kuhirt's views in 1964, see Ulrike Goeschen, "From Socialist Realism to Art in Socialism. The Reception of Modernism as an Instigating Force in the Development of Art in the GDR," *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (January 2009): 50.



Susanne Kandt-Horn · Student aus Ghana
1960 · Kasein · 80 x 60 cm

7. Susanna Kandt-Horn, *Student aus Ghana*
(*Student from Ghana*), 1960, casein on canvas,
80 × 60 cm, Kunstarchiv Beeskow

Susanna Kandt-Horn, *Studentas iš Ganos*,
1960, drobė, kazeinas, 80 × 60 cm

superficial selection of topical political subjects—such as African students or flags—carried the “danger of symbolism.”⁴² He cautioned against relying on merely symbolic references to peace, solidarity, and political uprisings without close engagement with specific contexts. For Feist, Susanne Kandt-Horn’s *Student aus Ghana* (*Student from Ghana*, 1960)—a colorful portrait of a student in a striped polo shirt holding paintbrushes and a cornering tool—epitomizes this problem [Fig. 7]:⁴³

42 Here and following: Günter Feist, “Meilenstein des Bitterfelder Weges,” *Bildende Kunst* 9 (1960): 578.

43 While the title accompanying the reproduction in Feist’s article is *Student aus Ghana*, the Kunstarchiv Beeskow, where the painting is currently housed, lists the work as *Negerstudent des VGTAN oder Ankrah aus Ghana*. The offensive moniker was frequently used to refer to African students and other Black immigrants in East Germany—even by Feist himself. Its uncritical usage reflects a key ideological blind spot in East German antiracism.



8. Emil Nolde, *Papuan Youth*, 1914, oil on canvas, 70 × 103 cm, Neue Nationalgalerie

Emil Nolde, *Papua jaunuoliai*, 1914, drobē, alieģus, 70 × 103 cm

This artist undoubtedly possesses a highly developed decorative talent, but she should apply it where decoration is appropriate, and that is certainly not the case with panel painting, least of all with portraiture. Pointed forms and a palette of garish contrasts, obtrusively revealing the artist's hand, destroy everything inherent in this young Negro that ought to be recognized in terms of individual human value, transforming him into a rare exotic plant, regarded with superficial curiosity for his foreign appearance rather than with eyes of inner sympathy and like-mindedness.

In addition to his concern with symbolism, Feist also rebukes the exoticification of foreign students, which he sees in the strong colors and exaggerated geometric shapes—the “pointed forms”—that characterize the student's eyes, lips, and nose. In fact, though fully clothed and situated indoors, the student bears a resemblance to the figure on the right in Emil Nolde's *Papuan Youth* (1914), an Expressionist painting that romanticizes



Karl Heinz Jakob - Tischgespräch - 1960 - Öl - 140 x 160 cm

9. Karl Heinz Jakob, *Tischgespräch* (*Table Conversation*), 1960, oil on canvas, 140 × 160 cm, location unknown

Karl Heinz Jakob, *Pokalbis prie stalo*, 1960, drobė, aliejus, 140 × 160 cm

natural energy (evident in the waves) and, in a startlingly dehumanizing way, the simplicity of island life. The figures are stereotypically portrayed with minimal clothing, as if fully integrated into their environment, without reflection on colonialism or the racial politics of vision [Fig. 8]. Nolde, who began his career with the Expressionist group *Die Brücke*, eventually declared allegiance to National Socialism, confirming, in Lukác's view, the ideological proximity between Expressionism and Nazism. Both Nolde's figure and Kandt-Horn's student have angular heads and almond-shaped eyes, exaggerated formal features that emphasize external appearances at the expense of the subjects' inner life. Feist's critique implicitly rejects early primitivist movements, steering painters away from some of the catastrophic precedents in German art history.

In the next paragraph, Feist discusses another painting by Karl Heinz Jakob in detail, *Tischgespräch* (Table Conversation, 1960, [Fig. 9]). In the scene, a large group, mostly comprised of white Germans, huddles around a dining table. One man, standing in the background, may be a South Asian student, though it is difficult to say for certain. Focusing on a similar concern as Kuhirt, Feist criticizes the painting for its sense of “psychological isolation,” claiming that “physiognomic characteristics” of the figures are exaggerated to the point of “morbidity.” The bold colors and distorted shapes recall, according to Feist, not only Cezanne but also the “Naturalism of the [18]80s and [18]90s.” In addition to the aesthetic debates already mentioned, Feist’s remarks raise a further question: was he particularly sensitive to physiognomy? How would East German viewers have interpreted these facial features, long considered markers of race?

According to Slobodian, socialist chromatism brought about a re-signification of phenotypical features—one in which racial characteristics continued to be visible but were stripped of their long-established racist connotations. Though Slobodian makes this important point, he does not describe explicitly how the two became distinguished.⁴⁴ Contemporary articles in the East German newspaper *Neues Deutschland* suggest a calculated campaign to recompose the optics of race using the very tools that had once served scientific racism. Two articles focused on a new translation of the book *Menschenrassen* (Human Races) by Soviet anthropologist Michail Fjodorowitsch Nesturch, which sought to explain the origins and nature of “human races” to a general audience.⁴⁵ Both articles included photographs of international students, suggesting that foreign students and youth were one of the primary sites in East German public life through which thinking about race was being reshaped [Fig. 10, 11]. In his book, Nesturch traces the evolutionary development of three main racial groups and their corresponding characteristics, while endeavoring to delink these characteristics from any associations with human capacity and intelligence—central

44 “Reframed in a symbolic framework of horizontal, international solidarity, the potentially negative associations of these earlier precedents seemed to have been lost on socialist designers.” Slobodian, “Socialist Chromatism,” 28.

45 M. F. Nesturch, *Menschenrassen* (Leipzig & Jena: Urania-Verlag, 1959); Dr. N. Tich, “Wie sind die Menschenrassen entstanden?” *Neues Deutschland*, February 5, 1956, 9; Hawe, “Was sind Menschenrassen?” *Neues Deutschland*, March 12, 1960, 11.



10 A, B. Photographer unknown, *Menschen verschiedener Hautfarbe, aber gleicher Gesinnung* (People of Different Skin Color but the Same Mood), black and white photograph from Joachim Heidrich, "Wie die Menschenrassen entstanden sind," *Neues Deutschland* (August 25–26, 1956): 9



Nežinomas fotografas, *Skirtingos odos spalvos, bet vienos dvasios žmonės*, juodai balta fotografija, Joachim Heidrich, "Wie die Menschenrassen entstanden sind" (*Neues Deutschland*, 1956 m. rugpjūčio 25–26 d.)



11 A. B. Lüder, *Ein Indischer Aspirant am Institute für Auslandsstudium* (An Indian Student at the Institute for Foreign Study), black and white photograph from Hawe, "Was sind die Menschenrassen?" *Neues Deutschland* (March 12, 1960): 11



Lüder, *Indijos studentas Užsienio studijų institute*, juodai balta fotografija, Hawe, "Was sind die Menschenrassen?" *Neues Deutschland* (1960 m. kovo 12 d.)

tenets of scientific racism. Yet as visual evidence, he employs drawings and scientific diagrams of body parts, strategies familiar from older racial sciences [Fig. 12]. In this framework, racial characteristics have no significance beyond the visual.

To understand the logic of this antiracist science, one example is particularly illuminating. A previous pseudoscientific distortion of evolutionary theory, as Nesturch points out, was the allegation that the over-eye arch appeared with greater frequency in the Black race—misconstrued as evidence of inferiority and evolutionary proximity to chimpanzees. Nesturch

Einsattelung in der Linie des Nasenrückens fort. Der Nasenrücken kann im Knochen- und Knorpelteil oder in einem dieser Teile aus- oder einwärts gekrümmt oder auch gerade sein.



Bild 1 Entwicklung der Oberlippsfalte bei einem Europäer (links) und einem Mongolen (rechts). Die unteren Darstellungen zeigen einen Querschnitt des Lids & unterer Rand der Falte

11



Bild 2 Verschiedene Formen des unteren Nasenteils und verschiedene Stellungen der Längsachsen der Nasenlöcher (von unten gesehen)

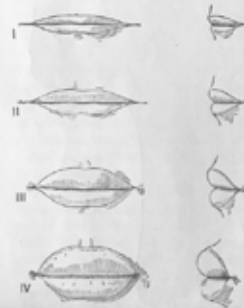


Bild 3 Verschiedene Breitenentwicklung der Lippen (von vorn und von links)
I schmale, II mittlere, III dicke, IV wulstige

12

Bei Ansicht des Kopfes von oben kann man unschwer feststellen, daß er bei den verschiedenen Menschen Varianten von länglichen bis zu runden Formen aufweist.

Den Anthropologen interessiert vor allem der Kopf- bzw. der Schädelindex, das in Prozenten ausgedrückte Verhältnis zwischen Breite und Länge des Kopfes bzw. des Schädels. Je länger der Kopf ist, um so geringer ist die Größe des Kopfindex.

Wenn der Kopfindex 75,9 oder weniger beträgt, liegt Dolichokephalie (griech. *dolichos* — lang, *kephale* — Kopf) vor, Indizes von 76,0 bis 80,9 zeigen Mesokephalie (griech. *mesos* — mittel) und über 81,0 Brachykephalie (griech. *brachys* — kurz, *brut*) an. Bei der Schädelmessung verwendet man diese

12 A. B. M. F. Nesturch, *Menschenrassen* (Leipzig & Jena: Urania-Verlag, 1959), 11 & 12

M. F. Nesturch, *Menschenrassen* (Leipzig & Jena: Urania, 1959)

debunks this myth, arguing that the over-eye arch varies equally across all races. In his words, “[a] strongly developed over-eye arch in people today, even when it appears together with a receding forehead, is something foundationally other than the brow ridge of Neanderthals and does not signify primitiveness.”⁴⁶ Therefore, East German viewers of the late 1950s—at least those attuned to state media—were encouraged to question and reject their own assumptions about the appearance of African subjects. Even if the sharply angled forehead of the student depicted in profile in Jakob’s painting might seem exaggerated by today’s standards, it was, at least in the eyes of the regime, neither exceptional nor indicative of limited intelligence.

Given this antiracist campaign, it is understandable that Feist would be attentive to physiognomy—one of the major problem areas in the visual culture of the time. Though Feist sharply repudiates symbolism, exoticism, and the exaggeration of physiognomic features, he overcompensates in the

46 Nesturch, *Menschenrassen*, 45.



13. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Bildnis des Negers Ikala* (3. Fassung) (*Portrait of the Negro Ikala* [third version]), 1960, oil on canvas, 93 × 54 cm, location unknown

Wilhelm Rudolph, *Juodaodžio Ikalos portretas* [trečia versija], 1960, drobė, aliejus, 93 × 54 cm

opposite direction, privileging psychological depth in a way that relies on a different nonscientific racial stereotype. Just after vilifying Kandt-Horn, Feist elevates Wilhelm Rudolph's *Bildnis des Negers Ikala* (3. Fassung) (Portrait of the Negro Ikala [third version], 1960) as a positive counterexample [Fig. 13]. Feist praises Rudolph for accurately depicting the subject's "weathered" emotional state, conveyed through squinting eyes, aged clothing, and greying hair: "he begins with the subject's singularity, stepping himself quietly aside, by portraying the [man] in profile, by switching off

all bodily action, and by letting him calmly ruminate in quiet melancholy.” The stereotype of the melancholic African, which had circulated in prewar Soviet visual culture, emphasized “longing” over agency.⁴⁷ Such depictions suggested that African subjects were patiently waiting for liberation as part of the broader socialist movement, rather than taking control of their own destiny. Feist’s ardent support for Rudolph’s painting demonstrates that antiracism in the GDR remained entangled with white paternalism. Although the rejection of exoticism and empty symbolism marked a limited improvement in the depiction of foreigners, the intersection of Socialist Realism and antiracism in East Germany continued to reproduce problematic representational tropes.

Looking back from 1969, arts editor and publicist Bernhard Nowak traced the genealogy of the book-and-reader motif across history and class, spanning from holy clerics in medieval times to nineteenth-century bourgeois portraits featuring books as “status” symbols, and the worker-reader of the socialist present.⁴⁸ His goal was to find instances when the activity of learning and reading became a form of “revolutionary comportment [*revolutionäres Verhalten*].”⁴⁹ Although written after the strictures of Socialist Realism had loosened, Nowak’s article remains noteworthy—not only because he discusses East German depictions of African students at length, but also because he reveals further shortcomings in East German solidarity:

The Negro students pictured study at our universities; we consider them friends, yet their study abroad is a bitter necessity so long as their national languages are not yet written languages. Their books, beginning with school-books, are written in English or French. We read in a report from Mali: “With the death of every old man, a library burns.” The rich treasure of African fairy tales, legends, proverbs, and songs, which have never been written down and exist only in oral transmission, would be doomed to extinction if not for the creation of African alphabets now, through which the free peoples of Africa will

47 Christina Kiaer, “Inventing an Aesthetics of Anti-Racism: African Americans in Early Soviet Visual Culture,” in *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture*, ed. Yevgeniy Fiks, Denise Milstein, and Matvei Yankelevich (Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021), 110.

48 Bernhard Nowak, “Leser und Buch im Bild,” *Bildende Kunst* 1 (1969): 32.

49 Nowak, “Leser und Buch im Bild,” 36.

finally attain written languages and autonomous national literatures. Solidarity of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries accelerates this cultural and scientific development, delayed for hundreds of years by colonial oppression.⁵⁰

Nowak transforms the mundane activity of reading in these pictures into a global geopolitical struggle, cleverly positioning the Soviet Union and the GDR's hospitality as urgent and indispensable. However, the narrative he retells betrays a marked disregard for oral forms of storytelling, preservation, and transmission, treating them as entirely precarious or futile. Moreover, it rests on the long-standing false assumption that West Africa lacked any script prior to the introduction of European languages like English and French. In fact, the use of Arabic script for West African languages—known as Ajami—both predated and persisted throughout European colonialism.⁵¹ In this way, solidarity, often understood as support for another's dream or struggle, became aid for voluntary assimilation into European systems of knowledge.

Shortly thereafter, Nowak expresses his preference for Eva Schulze-Knabe's portrait of a single figure, *Afrikanischer Student* (1960), over Jakob's painting [Figs. 14 and 2].⁵² He argues that Schulze-Knabe's work more accurately captures the "ethos" and "dignity" of Africans studying in the GDR. Although Nowak does not explicitly mention psychology, his choice of language demonstrates an inclination towards the moral framework established by Ulbricht's directives from a decade earlier—implying that other socialist subjects should emulate the dignified comportment embodied by Schulze-Knabe's student.

Unlike the unruly, potentially distracting brushstrokes and the ambiguous window in Jakob's work, the light-yellow background in Schulze-Knabe's painting is calming and conducive to uninterrupted focus. The strokes and patches of paint in the background all move uniformly along a slightly tilted vertical axis, a feature that seems to encourage a steady flow of

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fallou Ngom, "Ajami Literacies of West Africa," in *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, eds. Ericka A. Albaugh & Kathryn M. de Luna (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 143–64.

⁵² A descendant recognized the Nigerian student as Chukwuemeka Ogbue, informing the curators at the Staatliche Kunstsammlung in Dresden. As a result, the painting has been renamed *Chukwuemeka Ogbue (Student aus Nigeria)*.



14. Eva Schulze-Knabe, *Chukwuemeka Ogbue* (*Student from Nigeria*), 1960, mixed media on canvas, 95.5 × 75.5 cm, Albertinum, Gal. No. 3384 © Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Photo by Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut

Eva Schulze-Knabe, *Studentas iš Nigerijos* (*Chukwuemeka Ogbue*), 1960, mišri technika ant drobės, 95.5 × 75.5 cm, Albertinum, Gal. No. 3384 © Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut nuotrauka

thought. Here, the lighting is clear and bright; the student can press onward with the task of reading. There, by contrast, it may be near dusk, and the students seem prone to weariness. Furthermore, the clothing in Schulze-Knabe's painting—a white-collared button-down shirt paired with grey-brown chinos—stands in sharp contrast to Jakob's colorful workwear. Overall, Schulze-Knabe's palette is moderate and more consistent, far removed from the bright and eclectic colors of Expressionism. Instead of teal green, highlights on the figure's skin are rendered in white on his lips, hand, and forehead. Schulze-Knabe's reader is fully illuminated—literally whitened by his surroundings. He appears a well-groomed, docile pupil, dedicated to the goal of learning without doubt or qualms.

The paintings and corresponding criticism examined in this paper show how the politics of East German solidarity and antiracism shaped both art and its critique. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the specific historical conditions of Socialist Realism steered painters towards psychology, which in some respects was at odds with transnational politics. While solidarity invokes shared feelings across different geographies and communities, this style of painting delved ever deeper into the psychological makeup of individual figures. Even though, according to Socialist Realist theory, these figures were meant to typify the broader socialist public, an unresolved tension persisted between the depths of individual psyche and the range of solidarity across boundaries. Moreover, in addition to challenging people's beliefs and misconceptions, genuine antiracism demands recognizing, discussing, and challenging the structural conditions that disadvantage specific racialized groups—an analysis that was never undertaken by the East German government. An overemphasis on psychology risks focusing all attention on feelings and thoughts as the root causes of racism, rather than on the persisting historical and material conditions. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss historical efforts at solidarity and antiracism altogether.

In addition to the perspectives of critics and art historians, it would be fascinating to know how African youths and students at the VII Youth Festival responded to Jakob's painting. Did they perceive contemplation, seriousness, exotification, or focus on physiognomic features? Could they

identify with the students depicted? While no historical records capture their responses, we do know that Ghanaian students reportedly proclaimed, “while outer freedom had been won, the struggle for inner freedom, freedom of personality, had just begun.”⁵³ These paintings represent East German attempts to envision what that freedom might look like. The differences among the artworks and the opinions of critics make it clear that solidarity and antiracism were not just univocal policies imposed top-down by a totalitarian regime; rather, they were subjects of debate, shaped by differing opinions, and sometimes conflicted with official guidelines.

Each painting in this study exhibits its own strengths and weaknesses, just as each critic displays unique preferences. Kuhirt favored the cheerful, promising attitude of Womacka’s *Junger Pionier* over the more uncertain impact of Jakob’s *Afrikanische Studenten*. Feist rejected symbolism, exoticism, and exaggerated physiognomy in several works, instead valuing the humanizing force of strong emotions like melancholy, as seen in Rudolph’s *Bildnis des Ikalas*. Lastly, Nowak praised the comportment captured in Schulze-Knabe’s *Afrikanische Student* as exemplary. In all three cases, Jakob’s style was ranked lowest—a reflection of contemporary aesthetic tastes favoring restrained color palettes, spatial depth, refined and neat brushwork, lively figures, and dignity. Jakob’s painting, regarded by the critics as overly naturalistic, represented a missed opportunity for both Socialist Realism and the politics of antiracism and solidarity. It presented a version of Socialist Realism that did not portray exclusively positive psychological moods or docile subjects assimilating to the ideal image of socialist youth. Instead, it depicted learning and contemplation as difficult, intimate work—marked by distraction, fatigue, and the challenge of understanding what is read.

Received — 2025 07 10

53 VII. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten für Frieden und Freundschaft in Wien, 26.7.1959–4.8.1959. *Analyse und Kommentar*, ed. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für gesellschaftspolitische Studien (Monschau: Buchdruckerei Jacob Weiss, 1960).

Bibliography

- Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Benjamin, Walter, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, and Georg Lukács. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso, 1980.
- Bonnke, Manuela. *Kunst in Produktion: Bildende Kunst und volkseigene Wirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR*. Köln: Böhlau, 2007.
- Brock, Angela. "Producing the 'Socialist Personality':" In *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979*, edited by Mary Fulbrook, 220–246. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.
- Burton, Eric, and Immanuel R. Harisch. "Sozialistische Globalisierung: Tagebücher der DDR-Freundschaftsbrigaden in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika." *Studies in Contemporary History* 17 (2020): 578–91.
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "Propaganda Themes of the Vienna Festival." Declassified report, 1959.
- Cheng, Yinghong. *Creating the "New Man": From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009.
- Chu, Jinyi. "Civilizational Myth and Class Politics: Lenin on China and Racial Revolution." *Comparative Literature* 75, no. 2 (2023): 140–52.
- Dinkel, Jürgen. *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992)*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Eschen, Frederike. "Positionen zur Moderne in der DDR am Beispiel der Zeitschrift Bildende Kunst." In *Bildgespenster: Künstlerische Archive aus der DDR und ihre Rolle heute*, edited by Elize Bisanz and Marlene Heidel, 327–66. Bielefeld: Transkript Verlag, 2014.
- FDGB-Lexicon. "10 Gebote Der Sozialistischen Moral." 2009. http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/texte/sachteil/z/10_Gebote_der_sozialistischen_Moral.html.
- Feist, Günter. "Milestones of the Bitterfeld Path." In *Kunstkombinat DDR: Daten und Zitate zur Kunst und Kunstpolitik der DDR 1945–1990*, edited by Günter Feist and Eckhart Gillen. Berlin: Museumspädagogischen Dienst, 1990.
- Feist, Günter. "Wir müssen es uns schwerer machen." *Bildende Kunst* 12 (1963): 619–24.
- Feist, Günter and Eckhart Gillen, eds. *Kunstkombinat DDR: Daten Und Zitate Zur Kunst Und Kunstpolitik Der DDR 1945–1990*. Berlin: Museumspädagogischen Dienst, 1990.
- Feist, Peter H. "Principles and Methods of Marxist Kunstwissenschaft – Attempt at an Outline." Translated by Tamara Golan and Felix Jäger. *Selva* 5 (2024): 26–52.
- Freie Deutsche Jugend Zentralrat & Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands. *Ausstellung Junger Künstler*. 1959.
- Friedland, William H. *African Socialism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964.
- Goeschen, Ulrike. "From Socialist Realism to Art in Socialism: The Reception of Modernism as an Instigating Force in the Development of Art in the GDR." *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (2009): 45–53.
- Goeschen, Ulrike. *Vom Sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus: die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001.
- Gramkow, Wilma. *Das Herder-Institut in Leipzig im Wandel der Zeiten 1961–1990*. PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 2006.
- Gray, William Glenn. *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Hadjinicolaou, Nicos. "Shreds of a Dialogue on Marxist Art History During the Cold War."

- Selva 5 (Spring 2024): 53–71.
- Hawe. "Was sind Menschenrassen?" *Neues Deutschland*, March 12, 1960.
- Kiaer, Christina. "Inventing an Aesthetics of Anti-Racism: African Americans in Early Soviet Visual Culture." In *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture*, edited by Yevgeniy Fiks, Denise Milstein, and Matvei Yankelevich, 107–14. Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021.
- Koivunen, Pia. *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022.
- Kuhirt, Ullrich. "Malerei und Plastik junger Künstler." *Bildende Kunst* 7 (1959): 436.
- Lau, Maria. "Die Picasso-Rezeption in Der DDR: Offizielle Wahrnehmung Und Künstlerischer Dialog." Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Magnitz, Kurt. "Die Wahrheit der Kunst ist die Wahrheit des Lebens: Zur 3. Deutschen Kunstausstellung in Dresden." *Bildende Kunst* 2 (1953): 45–50.
- Magona, Sheku S. *Philosophische Probleme in der nationalen Befreiungsbewegung Afrika an Hand der philosophischen Anschauungen Nyereres mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Freiheitskonzeption*. PhD diss., Karl-Marx-Universität, 1970.
- Matusevich, Maxim. "Soviet Antiracism and Its Discontents: The Cold War Years." In *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, edited by James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, 229–61. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.
- McCloskey, Barbara. "Dialectic at a Standstill: East German Socialist Realism in the Stalin Era." In *Art of Two Germanys—Cold War Cultures*, edited by Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann. New York: Abrams, 2009.
- Mende, Doreen. "Looking Closely: A Visual Pedagogy as Display of Politics (For Angela Davis)." In *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*, edited by Kathleen Reinhardt. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2021.
- Nationales Komitee der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik; Freie Deutsche Jugend Zentralrat & Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands. *Internationale Ausstellung Junger Künstler*. 1959.
- Nesturch, Michail Fjodorowitsch. *Menschenrassen*. Leipzig & Jena: Urania-Verlag, 1959.
- Ngom, Fallou. "Ajami Literacies of West Africa." In *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, edited by Ericka A. Albaugh and Kathryn M. de Luna, 143–64. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Nowak, Bernhard. "Leser und Buch im Bild." *Bildende Kunst* 1 (1969): 32–6.
- Picasso, Olga, Jacqueline Picasso, Françoise Gilot, Maya Picasso, Paloma Picasso, Christine Ruiz-Picasso, Sydney Picasso, et al. *Der geteilte Picasso: Der Künstler und sein Bild in der BRD und der DDR*. Edited by Julia Friedrich. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2021.
- Pieck, Wilhelm. "DDR begrüßt Welfestspiele." *Neues Deutschland* (East Germany), July 29, 1959.
- Piesche, Peggy. "Black and German? East German Adolescents Before 1989: A Retrospective View of a 'Non-Existent Issue' in the GDR." In *The Cultural After-Life of East Germany: New Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Leslie A. Adelson, 37–59. Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2002.
- Pugach, Sara Elizabeth Berg. *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022.
- Pugach, Sara Elizabeth Berg. "Agents of Dissent: African Student Organizations in the German Democratic Republic." *Africa* 89, no. S1 (2019): S90–108.

- Pugach, Sara Elizabeth Berg. "Eleven Nigerian Students in Cold War East Germany: Visions of Science, Modernity, and Decolonization." *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 3 (2019): 551–72.
- Reinhardt, Kathleen, ed. *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2021.
- Rosen, Tobias. "An East-German Painting of African Students at the VII World Festival in Vienna." *Art in Networks—The GDR and Its Global Relations*. Effective December 2022. <https://artinetworks.webspace.tu-dresden.de/en/beitraege/an-east-german-painting-of-african-students-at-the-vii-world-festival-in-vienna>.
- Runge, Irene. *Ausland DDR: Fremdenhass*. Berlin: Dietz, 1990.
- Rupprecht, Tobias, ed. "Introduction: The End of Soviet Isolationism after 1953." In *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Schenck, Marcia C. *Remembering African Labor Migration to the Second World: Socialist Mobilities between Angola, Mozambique, and East Germany*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
- Slobodian, Quinn. "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany." In *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian, 27–50. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015.
- "Solidarität mit der Kolonialjugend." *Neue Zeit* (East Germany), August 1, 1959.
- Stanek, Lukasz. *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.
- Steinkamp, Maike. *Das unerwünschte Erbe: die Rezeption "entarteter" Kunst in Kunstkritik, Ausstellungen und Museen der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der frühen DDR*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008.
- Tich, N. "Wie sind die Menschenrassen entstanden?" *Neues Deutschland*, February 5, 1956.
- Uladh, Damian Mac Con. "'Studium bei Freunden?' Ausländische Studierende in der DDR bis 1970." In *Ankunft – Alltag – Ausreise: Migration und interkulturelle Begegnung in der DDR-Gesellschaft*, edited by Christian Th. Müller. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2005.
- VII. *Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten für Frieden und Freundschaft in Wien, 26.7.1959–4.8.1959. Analyse und Kommentar*. Monschau: Buchdruckerei Jacob Weiss, 1960.
- Weis, Toni. "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 351–67.
- Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Ziegler, Bernhard [pseud. of Alfred Kurella]. "Nun ist dies Erbe zuende ..." *Das Wort* 2, no. 9 (1937): 42–49.

Santrauka

Mokantis skaityti: solidarumas ir antirasizmas vėlyvojo laikotarpio Rytų Vokietijos socialistiniame realizme

Tobias Rosen

Reikšminiai žodžiai: socialistinis realizmas, antirasizmas, solidarumas, dekolonizacija, Šaltasis karas, Rytų Vokietijos socialistinis chromatizmas.

Straipsnyje autorius analizuoja santykį tarp Rytų Vokietijos socialistinio realizmo stiliaus ir solidarumo bei antirasizmo politikos XX a. 6 deš. pabaigoje ir 7 deš. pradžioje. Atsiliepiant į valstybės remiamą mokslinę kampaniją, kuria siekta pakeisti Rytų Vokietijos visuomenės požiūrį į rasę ir jos supratimą, Afrikos studentus vaizduojantys paveikslai atspindėjo įvairias nuotaikas ir psichologines būsenas – nuo nekantrumo iki nerimo kaip antirasistinės identifikacijos atspindžius. Kaip matome iš tuometinių meno kritikos straipsnių, nepaisant primestos rasinės sistemos, kurią istorikas Quinnas Slobodianas retrospektyviai pavadino „socialistiniu chromatizmu“, vyko diskusijos apie tai, kaip vizualiai išreikšti tarprasinį solidarumą.

Rytų Vokietijos tapytojo Karlo Heinzo Jakobo 1957 m. kūrinys *Afrikos studentai* (*Afrikanische Studenten*) yra lyginamas su keliais Rytų Vokietijos menininkų paveikslais, kuriuose vaizduojami studentai ir kiti Afrikos subjektai, tarp jų Walterio Womackos *Jaunoji pionierė* (*Junger Pionier*, 1959), Susannos Kandt-Horn *Studentas iš Ganos* (*Student aus Gana*, 1960) ir Wilhelmo Rudolpho *Juodaodžio Ikalos portretas (trečioji versija)* (*Bildnis des Negers Ikala (3. Fassung)*, 1960). Kritiškai peržiūrint meno kritikų ir kultūros veikėjų, tarp jų Ulricho Kuhrito, Günterio Feisto ir Bernhardo Nowako, leidinyje *Bildende Kunst* paskelbtus komentarus, šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiami ir interpretuojami įvairūs meno istorijos požiūriai ir nuomonės apie rasę svarbiu Šaltojo karo laikotarpiu.

Kuhirtas, Feistas ir Nowakas kalba apie antirasizmo ir solidarumo poveikį meno istorijai. Nors savo kritiniuose straipsniuose jie pasisakė prieš tuščią simbolizmą, egzotizavimą ir fiziognominių bruožų perdėtą išraišką tapyboje, kartais jie patys pasiduodavo įsišaknijusiems probleminiams stereotipams – pavyzdžiui, pagyvenusio

melancholiško afrikiečio tropui. Jie teikė pirmenybę darbams, vaizduojantiems akivaizdžiai giedras ir optimistiškas (Womackos pionierė) arba susikaupimo ir paklusnumo (Schulzės-Knabės studentas) psichologines būsenas, bet ne Jakobo studentams, kurie atrodo labiau pavargę ir potencialiai neramūs. Skirtingai nei kiti dailininkai, Jakobas pasiūlė vėlyvojo socialistinio realizmo versiją, kuriai įtakos turėjo tokie modernistiniai judėjimai kaip ekspresionizmas, ir vengė dogmatiškai optimistinio socialistinės pažangos suvokimo.