Beuys and after: contemporary German drawing from the collection: the Museum of Modern Art, February 1-May 14, 1996

[Magdalena Dabrowski]
Within the Museum’s holdings of contemporary drawings, those by German artists constitute the most comprehensive and coherent group. These works demonstrate the diversity of expression in the work of three generations of vanguard German artists active in the years since World War II. Although by no means representative of all tendencies or even all stages within the development of the individual artists, the works included in this exhibition reflect the vivacity and complexity of that period’s artistic climate.

Although German art in the 1950s was largely in disarray, in subsequent decades Germany has been the locus of exceptionally varied and provocative innovations. The National Socialist regime had put an abrupt end to the development of progressive art, which the Nazis deemed “degenerate.” Postwar generations thus had a dual task: to face the void created by the annihilation of the avant-garde tradition and to formulate a national identity that would confront the heinous political past while allowing them to look toward the future. Artists born before or during World War II felt compelled to invent an artistic vocabulary that would reflect their society’s disturbing rupture with the past. Active in the Düsseldorf-Cologne area and Berlin—then the two principal centers of artistic effervescence—these artists strove to achieve a distinctive language of creative expression.

Joseph Beuys emerged as the pivotal figure in this process. Through the performances he called “actions” and his various activist Happenings, where art and life merged into what he termed...
“social sculpture,” Beuys created a personal myth of heroic proportions. He attempted to come to terms with the national psyche by criticizing Germany’s postwar emphasis on material rather than spiritual values. In the course of his various artistic phases, Beuys produced thousands of works that subverted traditional notions of drawing and emphasized its conceptual aspects. Beuys’s personal and idiosyncratic works on paper represent his first visual manifestation of the abstract idea. Throughout his career he repeatedly shifted his conception of drawing, stressing the crucial importance of each individual work and essentially rejecting style as the primary element of art. His early drawings, derived from observations of nature or of objects, are nevertheless meticulous renderings of abstract concepts. Their precise delineation recalls the German Romantics’ careful attention to detail. By focusing on the drawing mark itself and the spiritual aspects of drawing, Beuys radicalized the medium in a way that deeply influenced younger generations of artists.

Anselm Kiefer, impressed by Beuys’s integrity and conscience, investigated the difficult territory of the German past and its roots. Kiefer directed his creative energies toward a new vision of painting. For him, the notion of the new encompassed both form and content: both experimentation with nontraditional mediums like straw and lead, and exploration of German myths and biblical themes to convey their universal dimension and to imbue his work with ethical and often religious values (fig. 2).

While Kiefer probed his German heritage and formulated a new expressive mode, numerous artists in Berlin were introducing bold pictorial innovations. The aggressive, dramatic Neo-Expressionism of Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorff, Markus Lüpertz, and A. R. Penck (Ralf Winkler) was the obvious heir of the German Expressionism of the first decades of this century. The younger Expressionists were largely inspired by Nietzsche and his views on human existence in tragic periods. Characterized by heavy, gestural brushstrokes, their work injected new energy into an artistic scene that had been disrupted by the war and the Berlin Wall.

These artists suffered from feelings of solitude, exile, and alienation—all inherited from the German Romantic tradition and now amplified by political reality. The Neo-Expressionists also fell under the spell of Beuys, who was introduced to Berlin in 1964 through that city’s first Happening, a performance of Beuys’s *The Chief*. At the same time, abstraction became the subject of vehement debate in Berlin and strongly affected these artists. Internal German influences fused with the powerful impact of the work of the American Abstract Expressionists—particularly Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Franz Kline, and Mark Rothko—whose paintings were first exhibited in Germany in 1958 in an exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art.

Although functioning in the same environment and sharing the same tradition as Kiefer, the Neo-Expressionists developed a fundamentally distinct style. The work of Baselitz, who left Berlin in 1963, utilizes the figurative tradition (fig. 3) but often inverts the figure and fractures the drawing of it, creating a new expressive reality. Lüpertz, in contrast, retains the presence of objects but pushes them to the edge of abstraction (fig. 4).

While Baselitz, Lüpertz, and their colleagues in Berlin were creating a new mood in art, their contemporaries in Düsseldorf were making the Rhineland a center of extraordinary activity and potential. Beuys, who taught at the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, and organized various “actions” there, provided a vital focal point. Moreover, the inauguration of the Cologne art fair in 1967 resulted in the opening of several galleries that began to show new art. Those who had emigrated from East Germany, like Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, sought to come to grips with postwar disillusionment. These artists, educated within the canon of Socialist Realism, were now surrounded by Western materialism. In 1963, joining in with Konrad Lueg (Fischer), they launched a new style called Capitalist Realism, reflecting their cynical and ironic attitude toward their adopted environment. A German version of Pop art, it made use of familiar imagery but inflected it with a critical, satirical tone.

Polke borrowed from mass media, frequently recycling the same image until it lost its original meaning. He mixed drawing, painting, photography, and printmaking to achieve a personal style. Sometimes he incorporated disparate sequences into a single collagelike narrative; in other works (fig. 5), he emphasized the mechanized mark within a limitless space that still referred to the flat picture plane. In many instances Polke has combined figurative and abstract elements, stretching the boundaries of both styles.
Richter moved away from Capitalist Realism through his color charts, city views, finger paintings, and cloud studies of the 1960s and 1970s. Abstraction has dominated his work since 1976. Often working in series, he emphasizes the sensuous quality of color, while his black and white drawings (fig. 6) explore the nuances of line and chiaroscuro, creating a mysterious pictorial reality.

A. R. Penck, Richter's contemporary and a compatriot from Dresden, emigrated to West Germany in 1980, although he had been exhibiting there since 1969. His work evolved in two directions. One involved highly structured compositions of childlike stick people and striding hieroglyphic figures evoking the "primitive"; the other consisted of nearly abstract drawings and watercolors. Penck's work emphasizes the sign, articulated and manipulated on different levels, and disregards the hierarchical structure of the traditional figure-ground relationship. Like other artists in this exhibition, he highlights the continuous interchange between the figurative and the abstract.

The generation of German artists born well after the war in the 1950s is represented by Günther Förg, Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen, Thomas Schütte, and Rosemarie Trockel. Their work provides an indication of the stylistic pluralism now flourishing in Germany. Having developed during a period of great national prosperity and a high point in art collecting, these younger artists express a different set of artistic concerns than their predecessors. They reinterpret the issues of early modernist abstraction, collage, and naive drawing, as well as those of the representational tradition. They embrace diverse interests including politics, anthropology, theology, sociology, and even mathematics, creating works of multilayered complexity.

Viewed together, these works confront us with evidence of a vivid national identity, while at the same time addressing universal issues in contemporary art.

Magdalena Dabrowski
Senior Curator, Department of Drawings

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Beuys and After
Contemporary German Drawings from the Collection

**Georg Baselitz**
Born 1938
*Big Night Down the Drain (Die Grosse Nacht im Eimer)*, 1963
Watercolor and graphite
24 3/4 x 19" (62.9 x 48.3 cm)
Gift of R. L. B. Tobin

*P. D. Zeichnung*, 1963
Ink and pastel on two sheets of paper
Overall dimensions: 33 3/4 x 24 3/4" (85 x 61.5 cm)
Purchased with funds given by Ronald S. Lauder and Leon D. Black

*Dog-Split (Hund-Geteilt)*, 1968
Pencil and watercolor
19 3/4 x 12 3/4" (49.9 x 32.8 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

*Massai*, 1972
Brush and ink, pencil, and charcoal
22 3/4 x 17 3/4" (57.5 x 45.3 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

*Eagle*, 1977
Oil and pencil
33 3/4 x 24 3/4" (86 x 61.1 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

*Untitled*, 1991
Pencil and pastel
34 x 24 3/4" (86.4 x 61.6 cm)
Gift of Barbara G. Pine

**Joseph Beuys**
1921–1986
*Untitled, 1947 and 1970s*
Pencil on four sheets of paper mounted on painted wood panel
Overall sheet dimensions: 11 3/4 x 38 1/2" (30 x 98.2 cm)
Gift of Agnes Gund and Ronald S. Lauder

*Hogan in Spring (Hogen im Früling)*, 1957
Watercolor, body color, dirt, and metallic paint
9 3/4 x 12 3/4" (24.5 x 32.8 cm)
(irregular)
Gift of Barbara G. Pine and purchase

*Dynamis 3*, 1960
Enamel, pen and ink, pencil, and glue on two sheets of paper mounted on construction paper
Overall dimensions: 19 3/4 x 13 3/4" (50.2 x 35.3 cm)
Purchase

*Untitled, 1974*
Pencil
8 1/2 x 5 1/2" (21.6 x 13.7 cm)
Gift of the artist

*Untitled (Sun State)*, 1974
Chalk on slate with wood frame
47 3/4 x 72" (120.7 x 183 cm)
Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (by exchange)

**Miriam Cahn**
Swiss, born 1949
Lives and works in Germany
*To Read in Dust, T.W.L. (The Wild Life) lesen im staub, d.w.l. [das wilde leben]*, 1984
Charcoal
Page 24 x 16 1/2" (61 x 43 cm)
Gift of Walter Bareiss

**Hanne Darboven**
Born 1941
*I B*, 1970–73
Pen and ink and typewriting on twenty-eight sheets
Each 11 3/4 x 33" (29.3 x 83.8 cm)
Gift of Ileana Sonnabend

**Giinther Förg**
Born 1952
Four Untitled drawings, 1987
Brush and colored ink on yellow paper
Each 9 1/4 x 7" (23.3 x 17.8 cm)
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Four Untitled drawings, 1989
Watercolor
Each 13 3/4 x 11" (35.2 x 28 cm)
Gift of R. L. B. Tobin and Mr. and Mrs. Bernard A. Greenberg
Jörg Immendorff  
Born 1945  
_Café Deutschland_, 1978  
Tempera  
$11 \frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$" (29.4 x 21.1 cm)  
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Cafe Deutschland, 1978
Tempera
11 1/4 x 8 3/4" (29.4 x 21.1 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Tables for Cafe Deutschland
_Tische für Cafe Deutschland_, 1978
Gouache and graphite
11 1/4 x 8 3/4" (29.6 x 20.8 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Anselm Kiefer  
Born 1945  
Birth of Painting  
_Nascita della Pittura_, 1981  
Synthetic polymer paint and oil on photograph  
$23\frac{3}{4} \times 31$" (58.8 x 78.7 cm)  
Purchase

Departure from Egypt  
_Auszug aus Ägypten_, 1984  
Synthetic polymer paint, charcoal, and string on cut-and-pasted photograph and cardboard  
$43\frac{3}{4} \times 33\frac{1}{2}$" (109.5 x 85 cm)  
Gift of the Denise and Andrew Saul Fund

Jörg Immendorff  
_Café Deutschland_, 1978  
Tempera  
$11 \frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$" (29.4 x 21.1 cm)  
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Martin Kippenberger  
Born 1953  
The World of the Canary  
_Die Welt des Kanarienvogels_, 1988  
Pencil  
156 sheets, each 5 1/2 x 4 1/2" (14 x 10.5 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss and R. L. B. Tobin

Markus Lüpertz  
Born 1941  
Atelier, c. 1973–74  
Tempera and crayon  
$16 \frac{1}{2} \times 22$" (41.7 x 55.9 cm)  
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Markus Lüpertz
Atelier, c. 1973–74
Tempera and crayon
16 1/2 x 22" (41.7 x 55.9 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Sline and Shovel, 1976  
Pastel  
$24\frac{3}{4} \times 16\frac{1}{2}$" (61.1 x 42.9 cm)  
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Untitled, 1980  
Charcoal, gouache, and chalk  
$19\frac{3}{4} \times 27\frac{3}{4}$" (49.8 x 70.2 cm)  
Purchase

Albert Oehlen  
Born 1954  
Four studies for Tannhäuser, 1987  
Cut-and-pasted printed papers, pencil, ink, and gouache  
$11 \frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{4}$" (29.2 x 22.2 cm)  
Gift of R. L. B. Tobin

Blinky Palermo  
(Peter Heisterkamp)  
1943–1977  
Untitled, 1971  
Conté crayon on sand paper and ink and synthetic polymer paint on painted wallpaper  
Overall dimensions:  
$17\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$" (44 x 26.7 cm)  
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Seven Untitled drawings, 1976  
Synthetic polymer paint on notebook paper mounted on board  
Each 27 3/4 x 19 1/4" (69.8 x 49.5 cm)  
Gift of The Learsey Family

Albert Oehlen
Four studies for Tannhäuser, 1987
Cut-and-pasted printed papers, pencil, ink, and gouache
11 3/4 x 8 1/4" (29.2 x 22.2 cm)
Gift of R. L. B. Tobin

Blinky Palermo
Untitled, 1971
Conté crayon on sand paper and ink and synthetic polymer paint on painted wallpaper
Overall dimensions:
17 3/4 x 10 1/4" (44 x 26.7 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Seven Untitled drawings, 1976
Synthetic polymer paint on notebook paper mounted on board:
Each 27 3/4 x 19 1/4" (69.8 x 49.5 cm)
Gift of The Learsey Family

Markus Lüpertz, Untitled. 1980. Purchase
A. R. Penck
(Ralf Winkler)
Born 1939
Seven Untitled drawings, 1967
Watercolor
Each 7 x 9 3/4" (17.9 x 24.5 cm)
Gift of Walter Bareiss and purchase

Untitled, 1975
Pencil
16 1/4 x 23 3/4" (41.9 x 59.4 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Frank Y. Larkin

Structure T. M., 1976
Tempera
28 3/4 x 40 3/4" (73.2 x 102.9 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Untitled, c. 1980-81
Watercolor
11 3/4 x 15 3/4" (29.4 x 40.4 cm)
Purchase

Nine Untitled drawings, 1980
Ink on parchment paper
19 3/4 x 29 3/4" (50.2 x 75.2 cm)
Gift of Ronald S. Lauder

Sigmar Polke
Born 1941
Free of Dizziness (Frei von Schwindelgelfühl), 1964
Ballpoint pen
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.7 x 21.1 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Joke (Witz), 1965
Felt-tipped pen and watercolor
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.8 x 21.2 cm)
Gift of Ronald S. Lauder

Silver Brick (Silberner Ziegelstein), 1965
Ballpoint pen
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.8 x 21 cm)
Gift of Barbara G. Pine

Physiognomy with Car, 1966
Ballpoint pen and gouache
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.6 x 20.8 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Whip, 1968
Pen and ink
8 3/4 x 5 5/8" (21 x 14.8 cm)
Gift of The Cosmopolitan Arts Foundation

Untitled, 1968
Watercolor, synthetic polymer paint spray, and gouache
37 3/4 x 25" (95.9 x 63.6 cm)
Purchase

Gerhard Richter
Born 1932
Engels, 1982
Pencil
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.7 x 21 cm)
Gift of Constance B. Cartwright

Static, 1982
Pencil
11 3/4 x 8 3/4" (29.5 x 21 cm)
Gift of Constance B. Cartwright
Untitled, 1982  
Pencil and pen and ink  
19¾ x 26¾" (49.3 x 68.3 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Firenze, 1983  
Pencil on two sheets  
of notebook paper  
Overall dimensions:  
14⅞ x 9⅞" (37.3 x 24.4 cm)  
Purchase

G. A. Nos. 1–5, 1984  
Colored inks, watercolor,  
pencil and crayon  
Each 11⅞ x 8¾" (29.7 x 21 cm)  
Gift of R. L. B. Tobin

Untitled, 1985  
Pencil  
9½ x 6¼" (23.8 x 15.9 cm)  
Purchase

Untitled, 1986  
Oil  
22⅜ x 32⅞" (57.8 x 83.4 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Untitled, 1988  
Colored inks and watercolor  
6½ x 9⅛" (16.5 x 23.8 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Untitled, 1988  
Colored inks and watercolor  
11½ x 15½" (29.9 x 39.6 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Untitled, 1988  
Colored inks and watercolor  
6⅞ x 9¾" (16.5 x 23.8 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Untitled, 1988  
Oil  
9¾ x 16¼" (24.8 x 41.5 cm)  
Gift of Barbara G. Pine

Untitled, 1990  
Pencil  
8¼ x 11½" (21.2 x 29.8 cm)  
Gift of The Contemporary  
Arts Council

Untitled, 1991  
Colored inks and watercolor  
9½ x 13½" (24.2 x 33.5 cm)  
Gift of the Patsy R. Taylor  
Family Trust

Thomas Schütte  
Born 1954  
Seven Untitled drawings,  
1989  
Watercolor, ink, gouache  
and pencil  
Each 12½ x 9½" (31.7 x 23.8 cm)  
Purchase

Rosemarie Trockel  
Born 1952  
Untitled, 1983  
Ink and gouache  
11⅞ x 8¼" (29.5 x 21 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss

Gift of Constance B. Cartwright

Gift of Walter Bareiss

Gift of Walter Bareiss

1984  
Watercolor on ruled paper  
8¼ x 6¼" (20.5 x 14.7 cm)  
Purchase

1984  
Watercolor on ruled paper  
8¼ x 6¼" (20.5 x 14.7 cm)  
Purchase

Guenter Tuzina  
Born 1951  
3-Part Drawing  
Series (3-Teilige  
Zeichnungsgruppe),  
1988  
Synthetic polymer paint  
and pencil  
Each 12½ x 9½" (31.8 x 23.8 cm)  
Gift of Walter Bareiss