BERLIN PROGRAM
for Advanced German & European Studies

German Studies Association GSA

Freie Universität Berlin

The Sudden and Startling Vanishing of a State: April Eisman and David F. Patton Reflect on German (Re)Unification

Fireworks at unification party, Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, October 3, 1990

When the *Volkskammer* (Parliament) of the German Democratic Republic decided to join the Federal Republic of Germany around 3 a.m. on **August 23, 1990**, it fell to PDS Parliamentarian Gregor Gysi to inform the *Volkskammer*'s Vice President Reinhard Hoeppner that three letters were missing in the *Beschlussfassung* (resolution) which just had been adopted. The passage Gysi was referring to read: „Die Volkskammer beschließt den Beitritt zum Geltungsbereich des Grundgesetzes am 3. Oktober." The three letters **DDR** had to be added by hand after the vote. This oversight in a parliamentary all-nighter foreshadows fierce debates about the treatment of the GDR and its citizens during and after the (re)unification[1] process.

German (re)unification proceeded with startling speed. Not even a year after the Fall of the Wall and six months after the first free elections in the GDR on **March 18, 1990**, the Unification Treaty was signed on **September 20, 1990**. It declared the accession of the GDR to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany according to Article 23 of German Basic Law, the German con-stitution. Effective on **October 3, 1990** the end of the East German state was sealed.

But why **October 3**? The Fall of the Berlin Wall happened on **November 9** a year earlier. The legacy of November 9, which is sometimes described as a *Schicksalstag* in German history, helps explain the *Volkskammer*'s choice. While **November 9, 1918** with the announcement of the first German Republic and the abdication of Wilhelm II can be seen as a turning point to a better future, the legacy of the night of **November 9, 1938**, when mobs and SA paramilitaries went on Anti-Semitic rampages, makes clear that a different date was needed to celebrate German (Re)Unification.

Demonstration against unification, Berlin, December 19, 1989

[1] Both terms are widely used, often interchangeably, despite the big little difference.

For our 30th anniversary (Re)Unification Special two distinguished scholars and Berlin Program Alumni reflect on the complexities of this momentous process which has not only dramatically shaped Germany, but has been a catalyst for change in Europe as well.

April Eisman, Associate Professor of Art and Visual Culture at Iowa State University and Berlin Program Fellow 2004/05. April teaches art history with an emphasis on contemporary art and theory. In her research, she specializes in East German art and its reception. In this essay, she examines the impact of unification on the Eastern German artist Angela Hampel (b. 1956), who was known on both sides of the Wall in the 1980s for her Neoexpressionist paintings of strong women from mythology and the Bible and for her commitment to gender equality.

David F. Patton is Joanne Toor Cummings '50 Professor of Government and International Relations at Connecticut College and Berlin Program Fellow 1989/90. David teaches comparative politics, contemporary Europe, the European Union, nationalism and ethnic conflict, and the Cold War. In his research, he specializes on German party politics, political regionalism and German foreign policy. In this work, he examines the political process of unification with the added perspective of a participant observer.

German Unification: Recollections and Reflections

by David F. Patton

In early January 1990, I returned to Berlin after a short visit to the US. As a doctoral student in political science, I could not have imagined that the coming year would be as momentous as the months I had just experienced. I recall the pilot announcing that we would soon be landing in formerly divided Berlin, amidst considerable merriment on the plane. Of course, the city and Germany would remain divided for another nine months, although in early January the prospect would have seemed fantastic that sixty-two million West Germans and sixteen million East Germans would be united in a single state by October. Just five weeks earlier, Chancellor Kohl had sketched out a step by step process to achieve closer contractual relations between the two countries, then confederal structures, and finally national unity within the context of unifying Europe. However, by early February it had become clear that unification would be coming much sooner than Kohl had envisioned. In the East, protesters chanted "*Wir sind ein Volk*," while East Germans were heading for West Germany in even greater numbers than they had in December. This exodus undercut the GDR's economy, imperiled its health care system, and prompted East Berlin to move forward *Volkskammer* elections to March 18. In the West, the warm welcome of 1989 was quickly giving way to resentment toward the newcomers. The SPD politician Oskar Lafontaine called for measures to stem the influx, as he would do more than a quarter century later when he urged his new party

Aerial view of the Berlin Wall in 1990

Die *Linke* to rethink its open borders stance. In early 1990, the flight provided justification for a speedy currency union: unless the *Deutschmark* (DM) comes to us, warned impatient GDR citizens, we will go to the DM.

For West Berliners, the weak East Mark meant that shopping in the GDR was very cheap. I resisted the temptation to swap DM at Bahnhof Zoo and head East but do recall buying a large piece of cheese in the East for a handful of groschen. At the time, Easterners grumbled that they were being bought out.

Although momentum for unification had grown by early February, so much so that even East Germany's Communist Premier Hans Modrow had a plan, consensus remained elusive on how to proceed. Two contested aspects of unification stood out: a "national" dimension and a "social" one. The former centered on how quickly and under what conditions unity should occur. Those in support of rapid unification banked on Article 23 of the Basic Law by which newly formed Eastern *Länder* could join the Federal Republic. The Kohl government (CDU/CSU-FDP), its allies in the GDR, and West German industry favored quickly extending West Germany's political and economic model eastward. Those in favor of a more gradual route initially pointed to Article 146, which anticipated a new constitution for a united Germany. They cautioned against a de facto annexation and called upon both countries to form a union that drew upon the experience of peoples so long separated. West German Social Democrats, Greens, trade unions, the churches and post-Communists of East Germany favored a less rushed path to unity.

A second dimension revolved around the costs of unification: how would the project be financed, through borrowing or through taxes? Who would pay? Chancellor Kohl downplayed these concerns, portraying currency union and unification as win-win, while forecasting an economic miracle, reminiscent of West Germany's in the 1950s. He spoke of "blossoming landscapes in the East," with "no one doing worse." In contrast, Lafontaine, the presumptive SPD chancellor candidate in the upcoming federal elections, highlighted the costs of merger and warned against greater social injustice as a result of a hasty pairing of such different systems.

Whereas demonstrations and migration drove change in 1989, migration and elections did so in 1990. East Germans voted four times and the first—the GDR *Volkskammer* election in March—was most important. I remember the excited anticipation of the vote and the expectation of a strong SPD showing in its former heartland. The East CDU and its partners in the Alliance for Germany triumphed, thanks in part to Chancellor Kohl's tireless campaigning and the allure of the *Deutschmark*, and the die was then cast for currency union by July 1 and unification via Article 23 by autumn. Despite vocal critics, among them *Bundesbank* president Karl Otto Pöhl, who warned against a 1:1 swap of DM and East Mark, the Kohl government agreed to a parity exchange rate for wages and salaries and for a limited amount of savings. In the spring, Oskar Lafontaine was convalescing from a late April knife attack in what was not to be the only act of political violence at this time: gunfire left the CDU politician Wolfgang Schäuble crippled; the Red Army Faction assassinated the head of the *Treuhand* agency Detlev Karsten Rohwedder on April 1, 1991. At his home, Lafontaine warned that a hasty currency union would be most expensive and trigger mass unemployment. I recall the ensuing drama when he threatened to step down as SPD chancellor candidate were his party to back the monetary union. All the same, the DM arrived on July 1, 1990. I was visiting Lutherstadt Wittenberg on that day and remember seeing from atop the Castle Church people gathered in

Window shopping in Wittenberg in July 1990

front of closed shops (it was a Sunday) to inspect newly displayed goods available for purchase the next day. I supposed it was similar to when West Germans suddenly found stores filled with goods following the introduction of the DM in 1948. It is no accident that Kohl evoked the allies' 1948 currency reform as he moved forward with currency union in 1990, just as he recalled the CDU's stewardship during the "economic miracle" of the 1950s.

It was remarkable to witness Helmut Kohl's image re-made in 1990. Just the previous year he had had to ward off an internal leadership challenge within the CDU. Known as the pear, given his rotund stature, Kohl was the butt of jokes that mocked his supposed provincialism and lack of intelligence. In one, he visits a surgeon to request a birthmark on his forehead. The doctor asks why and Kohl answers: "Gorbachev tells me I am a swell guy, but that I am missing something here." Kohl taps on his forehead. Another went as follows: Kohl and Thatcher are drinking beer together. Thatcher holds up her mug and says "to your health," Kohl then holds up his glass and toasts: "to your Dunkel." When Chancellor Kohl spoke in West Berlin on November 10, 1989, catcalls drowned him out. In early 1990, he was criticized for equivocating about the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's eastern border, likely calculated to undercut the far-right party *Die Republikaner*. Yet in 1990 Kohl seized the chance to become the unity chancellor, highlighting the historic opportunity, downplaying unification's costs, reassuring uneasy Western allies and striking a deal with Gorbachev, a leader he had once compared to Joseph Goebbels. For a political scientist researching chancellor democracy in the Federal Republic, it was fascinating to witness Chancellor Kohl drawing on the considerable resources of his office to navigate domestic and international hurdles in 1990.

Helmut Kohl took center stage at the unification ceremony in Berlin on October 2. A friend in the Berlin Program and I joined the celebration in front of the Reichstag. This time I heard no jeering. Among those on stage were Helmut Kohl and Willy Brandt who could each take credit for hastening unification. Kohl had followed Adenauer's so-called "policy of strength" vis-à-vis the Soviet Union by carrying through with the controversial deployment of US intermediate-range nuclear forces on West German soil, a decision intended to demonstrate resolve in the face of a Soviet nuclear arms build-up and to convince Moscow of the need for a new approach. In contrast, Brandt's new *Ostpolitik* had helped build mutual trust that surely informed Gorbachev's call for a Common European Home and his willingness to accept a unified Germany in NATO.

On December 2, 1990, all-German elections took place for the first time since March 1933. Led by Chancellor Kohl, the CDU/CSU won 43.8 percent nationally and 41.8 percent in the East. The FDP improved to 11 percent, bolstered by

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's popularity. Critics of the government's unification strategy, whether the SPD, the West German Greens (*Alle reden von Deutschland. Wir reden vom Wetter*) or the PDS, lost. Through decisive action, Kohl had achieved unification, a long-standing goal of the Federal Republic, peacefully and with the blessing of the former wartime allies and Germany's neighbors. As the August 1991 coup attempt by Soviet hardliners showed, the window to unification might not have stayed open for long. Likewise, a quick unification placed the former GDR within a stable, prosperous framework, ensuring a "privileged transformation" that other former Communist countries did not enjoy. Yet, as Lafontaine and many others had warned, the timing and terms of the currency union increased Eastern joblessness as labor costs far outpaced productivity. Did the Kohl government really have no alternative to the rapid incorporation of the GDR into the Federal Republic? At the time I believed that a less rushed approach would have been preferable, but that electoral considerations had carried the day, as they so often do.

Looking back at 1990, I would like to single out a few of the unintended consequences. Two relate to the way the country unified internally; two to unification's external dimensions. Because the GDR was folded into the West German legal order, there followed a sweeping elite transfer: Western Germans, versed in the FRG's laws and norms, replaced former Eastern elites. While this guaranteed the stable functioning of the transferred institutions, it also led to an underrepresentation of Easterners in top positions. Against the backdrop of economic crisis, this absence of descriptive representation fed a narrative of quasi-colonization (for what it is worth, Western officials received so-called "extra bush pay" for going East) and of second-class citizenship. The PDS subsequently rebounded as the "advocate of the East." Even today, many Easterners regard themselves as second-class citizens. The far-right AfD has cast itself in elections in the states of former East Germany as the champion of the ideals of fall 1989 (*Vollende die Wende!*) by which it means national pride as well as opposition to free speech restrictions (political correctness), thereby linking the Federal Republic to the oppressive GDR. Did unification unleash a wave of xenophobia and nationalism? After 1990, anti-immigrant violence surged, with brutal attacks in Hoyerswerda (September 1991), Rostock-Lichtenhagen (August 1992), Mölln (November 1992), and Solingen (May 1993), among many others. To critics, unification bolstered German ethnic nationalism, which found its ugly expression in racially-motivated attacks. To be fair, neo-Nazi groups had been gaining ground prior to 1990, and the German government did go out of its way to reject a chauvinistic path to unity. When I attended festivities in Berlin on October 2 and 3, 1990 I did not encounter exuberant nationalism, although it was surely present elsewhere. After

East Germans lining up at a bank in Meissen to exchange Ostmark for DM in July 1990

all, it was a national unification—not the kind of social project that Lafontaine and some Greens had envisioned—and demonstrators in the East had intoned "*Wir sind ein Volk*" and "*Deutschland einig Vaterland*," while a sea of German flags had engulfed Kohl's campaign rallies in 1990. This nationalism, coupled with economic crisis in the East and a spike in asylum applications, arguably laid the groundwork for resurgent right-wing extremism, which persists to this day.

In regard to diplomacy, Kohl and Genscher deservedly, in my opinion, garnered much praise in 1990. West Germany worked closely with the United States and other allies to keep the Federal Republic in NATO, which in turn kept US military bases in Western Germany. However, in February 1990, as Mary Sarotte has shown, Foreign Minister Genscher and US Secretary of State Baker had suggested that NATO would not expand any further to the east in an effort to assuage Soviet concerns. Yet this assurance was not put in writing nor did it become part of the 2 plus 4 treaty that restored full sovereignty to Germany. The Western powers have maintained that this referred to non-German NATO troops being stationed in the former GDR. As the Atlantic Alliance expanded into East-Central Europe, though, Moscow complained that the West had broken its word.[1] This alleged betrayal has become a mainstay of Russian grievance. Thirty years later, the Trump administration is moving thousands of US troops out of the Federal Republic; some are heading to Poland, to the chagrin of both Germany and Russia!

David F. Patton in his apartment in Pankow in 1990

Prior to 1990, the Kohl government had resisted European monetary union. It was not until after the Berlin Wall fell that Bonn agreed at the Strasbourg summit in December 1989 on convening an intergovernmental conference on a single currency. This was no coincidence. As the Kohl government pursued national unification, it faced skepticism among key allies. France, which had been pressing Germany on a single European currency, sought reassurance that Germany would remain tied to the West. To accommodate Paris, at a time when it badly needed its allies, Bonn agreed to move ahead with European monetary union. The quest for national unity shaped the timing and form of the euro even if, as the historian Timothy Garton Ash has noted, the witticism "the whole of Deutschland for Kohl, half the Deutsche Mark for Mitterrand" overly generalizes.[2]

Whereas colleagues of mine witnessed their research agendas vanish with the end of the Cold War, I had the good fortune to be able to incorporate unification into my research on the domestic bases of West German foreign policy—later published as *Cold War Politics in Postwar Germany*. Likewise, rising dissatisfaction in the East set the stage for the PDS's resurgence a few years later, which would be my next research project. On a personal note, the events of 1990 kept me in Berlin several more months. Through a Berlin Program Fellow, I learned of an affordable apartment in Pankow, just a stone's throw from the Soviet War Memorial, with a monthly rent of just 25 marks. Here is a photo of me at the apartment window.

Notes

[1] Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 215-29.

[2] Timothy Garton Ash, "United We Fall," *Hoover Digest*, 2000, no. 4. https://www.hoover.org/research/united-we-fall. Last accessed September 27, 2020.

The Impact of Unification on East German Art: The Case of Angela Hampel

by April Eisman

The thirtieth anniversary of German unification, like the thirtieth anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution, has led to increased reflection upon the East German past and its legacies today. Although much of this has focused on politics, I would like to look at how the historic events of 1989/90 affected the work of an East German artist who was prominent on both sides of the Berlin Wall at the time that it fell. The intent is to bring attention to an important artist largely overlooked in western scholarship (which continues to dismiss East German art, sight unseen, as little more than kitsch or political propaganda), but also to reveal the ambivalence that many artists, like writers and other intellectuals, felt toward unification.

Angela Hampel was born in Räckelwitz, East Germany, in 1956. Like many artists in the GDR, she first trained for another career (in her case, forestry) before turning to art, although she was active in art circles and attended an "evening school" for art for several years. From 1977–82 she studied painting and graphics at the Dresden Art Academy, one of four main art schools in East Germany. Just two years after graduating she began to create the kinds of works for which she is best known: neoexpressionist paintings of strong women from the Bible and mythology. The catalyst was Christa Wolf's then recent book, *Kassandra*, which focused on the Greek prophetess who was doomed to have her prophecies ignored because she had refused Apollo's advances. Widely seen as a critique of patriarchy and war, *Kassandra* inspired many artists, and especially women, on both sides of the Berlin Wall. Hampel responded by creating a series of prints focusing on punk-inspired women aggressively meeting the viewer's gaze (fig. 1). Wolf later described these prints as "anticlassical, challenging, cheeky, angry, everything but resigned" and acquired a set for her own collection.[1] Hampel also created a series of five paintings on the topic, which were shown at an exhibition the following year at the Nationalgalerie in East Berlin. Several reviews of the *Expressivität heute* exhibition mentioned Hampel, one calling her the exhibition's "most surprising discovery."[2] It was also here where the West German gallerist Hedwig Döbele first saw Hampel's work and invited her to show in an exhibition that would travel to three cities in West Germany and two in Austria beginning later that year. With this exhibition, her work again caught people's attention. According to Döbele, Hampel was "the big hit" (*der Renner*).[3]

Fig. 1 – Angela Hampel, Zu Christa Wolfs Kassandra, *1984*

From images of Cassandra, Hampel moved on to explore other powerful women from mythology and the Bible, including Medea, Salomé (fig. 2), and Judith, and to question why it is that powerful women from the past are so frequently presented as monsters. In each case, these were women who ultimately killed a man in cold blood (via decapitation) or, in the case of Medea, her own children. The expressive brushwork and contrasting colors, together with the punk-inspired hair, emphasize aggression, and yet there is also a sadness in the works, an interiority that counters the tendency among male artists to portray such figures as femmes fatales.

Fig. 2 – Angela Hampel, Salomé, 1985/86

As her artistic recognition grew, Hampel became an increasingly vocal advocate for gender equality in East Germany. Although women had had the right to work since 1949 (decades earlier than in West Germany), and many laws had been passed to try to help integrate women into more advanced positions in the workforce and to help with balancing career and maternal duties, women were not truly equal. This is a fact that Hampel had been aware of, but it did not become a focal point for her work until after an exhibition she organized with three friends at the Galerie Mitte in Dresden in 1987 was heavily criticized. As she explained it, "...we got a lot of flack because [the exhibition] was only women. That's where it really started . . . the engagement with feminism. Because that really upset us . . . I thought, aha, this is in fact a topic. One needs to take a closer look."[4] In response, she began organizing monthly meetings for women to discuss issues that affected them as artists, to visit exhibitions and each others' studios, and to host lectures and book readings. Hampel also began giving speeches in defense of gender equality, most famously at the Tenth Congress of the Artists Union in November 1988 where she criticized the relative lack of women in art exhibitions and on juries.

It was also in these years that Hampel began creating installations, which were fairly well known in Dresden at the time but have been largely forgotten in the years since unification. Indeed, it is one of these installations—*Offene Zweierbeziehung* (*Open Relationship*, fig. 3)—that was on view at the Twelfth District Art Exhibition in Dresden in the autumn of 1989. Created together with Steffen Fischer, *Open Relationship* presents nine life-sized figures—men and women—each trapped in a net and dangling above a bullet-shaped artillery shell. It was inspired by an Italian play of the same name that had been performed in Dresden a few months earlier; the play was about a toxic marriage. Hampel and Fischer similarly intended their work to be a commentary on gender relations writ large, but the events unfolding outside the museum walls affected how visitors interpreted it. As one visitor wrote in a questionnaire handed out in the exhibition: "For me, it reflects the helplessness of the current political participation (*Mitbestimmung*)."[5] Another wrote that it was "a very timely topic" that made him think of the situation in Leipzig and elsewhere, with "people trapped (*gefangen*), only slightly removed from the weapons (*Schußwaffe*)." The Berlin Wall would fall less than three weeks before the exhibition closed.

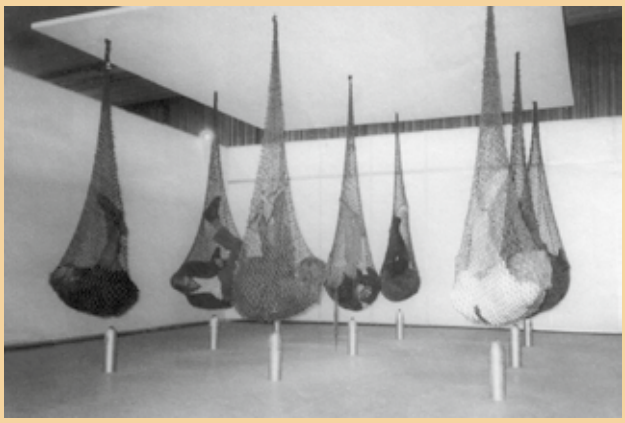

Fig. 3 – Angela Hampel and Steffen Fischer, Offene Zweierbeziehung, *1989*

A few weeks later, on December 19, 1989, Hampel and twenty-two other women—most of whom had been meeting together regularly since the heavily criticized *Innen/Außen* (*Inside/Outside*) exhibition—gathered at the Galerie Mitte for their annual Christmas party. In the excitement of the moment—the fall of the Wall less than six weeks earlier had seemed to make anything possible—Sigrun Hellmich, one of the art historians in the group, suggested they become an official organization. It would take another three months, but on March 26, 1990, the Dresdner Sezession 89 became the twenty-second organization entered into the City of Dresden's new Registry of Organizations (*Vereinsregister*). It was the first all-women artist group in the city's history. Just over a year later, they would open their first gallery, which would become a focal point for exhibitions, readings, and other events that promoted women and issues of interest to them.

But there were also indications that the future might not be as bright as they were hoping. The first sign of this emerged on December 20—just a day after the fateful Christmas gathering—when Helmut Kohl visited Dresden: for the first time, those advocating for an improved East Germany were crowded out by those wanting unification. A newspaper photograph from the following day shows Hampel standing in the crowd and holding up the center of a large banner stating, "*CDU-Männer an der Macht—heißt es für Frauen bald: gut' Nacht.*" It is a sentiment evident in more detail in a speech given two days earlier by Katrin Rohnstock of the *lila offensive*, a newly formed women's group, at an anti-unification demonstration in Berlin:

> Kohl is in the GDR. But what is hidden beneath his speeches about community treaties, solidarity, and help. . . We fear for the impoverishment of children, single parents, the old, and the disabled. Especially women, who continue to be paid worse than men, will be impacted by the cuts in social services. The annexation of the GDR would have devastating consequences for the majority of women. Foundational rights of women such as work and abortion are being placed in question. They are being exchanged for a place at the stove, economic dependency, prostitution and pornography cattle (*pornograVieh*).[6]

These early concerns became more urgent in the wake of the election on March 18, 1990, which showed that the majority of East Germans now wanted unification rather than a radical reworking of socialism. Early, utopian hopes for a better, more equal society quickly turned to a defense of the rights women already had in the East—such as the right to work and reproductive freedom—in the face of West Germany's conservative views toward women and families.

It was in this context that Hampel had her last solo exhibition in the GDR. Titled simply *Angela Hampel*, the six-week long exhibition opened at the Neue Dresdener Galerie in mid-June 1990 and reflects the artist's frustration with the political process and the implications of it for gender equality. On one end of the large gallery, sixteen vertical ribbon windows were covered in as many pleated blinds (*Rollos*), each with an expressively painted female figure—an angel, with intended connections to the artist's first name—crashing to the ground, their bodies crumpling together from the impact. These paintings (fig. 4) are flanked by two of six towering, guardian-like figures made out of weathered railway ties outfitted with rusted scythes of varying lengths that were scattered throughout the space.

Fig. 4 – Angela Hampel, photo from the Angela Hampel *exhibition, 1990*

Against the back wall, a "Standing Army" (*Stehendes Heer*) of five two-handed scythes stood in a row. On the floor in front of them, a few feet away, a collection of seven rocks of differing sizes, suggests a family of animals, an effect encouraged by the incorporation of fur into the surface of the rocks, and the work's title, *My Herd*. They seem to huddle together for warmth and protection. The organic material and shapes of the rocks stand in sharp contrast to the man-made scythes, suggesting a female counter to the masculine soldiers standing alone and at attention.

In the far corner of the exhibition room, across from the windows, the *Hirschfängerin*, which translates as "The Hunting Knife," yet taken literally, means "female stag catcher." On thick paper, ripped to look like the opening of a cave, are two nude women, connected by a rope that loops over a deer's head trophy hanging on the wall behind them. The figure on the right is seated with her hands bound; the captive. The other woman looks challengingly out at the viewer while holding the rope that ties up her prisoner. In front of them, a wooden railway tie anchors five steel animal traps, which are arrayed equidistantly in front of it, their jaws open and threatening. They suggest *vagina dentata*, protecting the figures from any who would come too close. The red background of the painting conveys the glow of a fire within a cave or, alternatively, hints at something demonic.

In addition to these works, Hampel also wrote a text, which appears in the catalog. Written in the first person, it tells how the narrator has been hearing the whooshing sound of a scythe for days. It could be the Grim Reaper coming, or the harvesting of crops. As the sound gets closer, the narrator breaks out in a sweat, "I want to run, but don't leave the spot. The sound gets closer. Risch. Rasch. Risch. Rasch. I want to turn around, but it is always at my back. Slowly the cold creeps up in me. I begin to shake." And then the narrator wakes up and is told by a lover, "Let it rustle, love, let it rustle."[7] According to Hampel, "These words accompanied me when making the work, have something to do with my situation, with the political situation that I'm trying to capture in this installation. And that's a pretty evil story (*böse Geschichte*)."[8] This comment—together with the text and the works in the exhibition as a whole—reflects the deep sense of foreboding Hampel and other leftist intellectuals in East Germany had as unification became an unavoidable consequence of the March 1990 elections.

In the year after unification, Hampel had to fight to keep her studio space in the inner Neustadt of Dresden. The new, western owners of the building had wanted to quadruple her rent. When she finally had to move out, she had to get rid of a number of her bigger works, including the guardians and fur-covered stones from the 1990 exhibition, because of a lack of affordable storage space. Similarly, the Dresdner Sezession 89 had to fight to keep its gallery space after new western owners (first Western German, later Swiss) acquired the building and, ultimately, increased their rent sixfold. In September 1991, they moved to a new, less desirable location on the outskirts of the city; the dilapidated state of the building ultimately led them to move again less than four years later, to their current location in the outer Neustadt of Dresden. Indeed, loss of studio space due to vastly increased rents—some as much as fifty times what they had been paying—was a problem that many Eastern German artists encountered in the early years after unification.

Whereas Hampel's paintings of women before the momentous events of 1989/90 had been colorful, expressive works of strong female figures from mythology and the Bible, her work after unification became darker and more personal. A series of paintings from 1991 focuses on a dark haired woman posing with an animal skull. Gone are the bright yellows, greens, and blues of her earlier work, also the mythological subject matter. Here the paintings are limited to dark red, black, and white. The woman confronts our gaze, most often while wearing the skull, some of which have the vertebrae still intact. In one, she holds a skull in front of her face and peers around it at the viewer (fig. 5). In some, the red appears like blood. In each, the woman looks confident but also wary. The sense of loss is palpable.

German unification in 1990 offered Hampel new opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise—from the founding of the Dresdner Sezession 89 to doing an artist residency in the United States in 2008. And yet, for many artists and intellectuals like Hampel—who were both highly praised and able to travel during the Cold War—the losses were far more significant. The peaceful revolution was initially about the promise of a better, socialist future, one in which gender equality was an important component. Unification closed down those possibilities and left Eastern Germans having to adjust to a capitalist system with its very different values and ways of doing things. Hampel was able to make the adjustment and has been able to survive as an artist in the new Germany, albeit on a smaller stage than in the 1980s. She continues to make and exhibit art, including sculptures that mark the skyline of Dresden (fig. 6), and in summer 2021, she will be the focus of a much-deserved retrospective exhibition at the Städtische Galerie in Dresden, which I am co-curating together with Dr. Gisbert Porstmann.

Fig. 5 – Angela Hampel, Untitled, *1991*

Fig. 6 – Angela Hampel, Undine geht, *1998 (installed 2012)*

Notes

[1] Christa and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *Malerfreunde: Leben mit Bildern* (Halle: Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2010), 179. All translations into English are my own.

[2] Astrid Volpert, "Im Alten Museum: Expressivität junger DDR-Maler," *Junge Welt*, August 20, 1985.

[3] Hedwig Döbele, interview by author, Dresden, May 2, 2017.

[4] Angela Hampel, interview by author, Dresden, March 4, 2013.

[5] Carla Weckeßer, "12. BKA-Dr 1989—Abschlussbericht zur Besucherfragung," unpublished report, page 25. Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin: VBKD Dresden 105.

[6] Speech by Katrin Rohnstock on December 19, 1989. <https://www.ddr89.de/lilo/LILO9.html> Last accessed: September 15, 2020.

[7] *Angela Hampel* (Dresden: Neue Dresdener Galerie, 1990).

[8] Asteris Kutulas, "'Ich hört ein Sichlein rauschen. . .' Im Gespräch mit Angela Hampel," *Union*, June 15, 1990, 4.

Imprint

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Festival of Lights, Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, September 19, 2020

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Thanks to Angela Hampel and David F. Patton for their permission to publish these images.

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